

## SONIC SNAPSHOT

# Randy Rhoads' Burning Pentatonics

BY KEN STEIGER



**RANDY RHOADS.** THE mere mention of his name evokes humbleness, wizardry, and grace.

Rhoads changed the course of heavy metal guitar with the lyrical, classically influenced lead parts he wove into the maniacal anthems on *Ozzy Osbourne's* first two albums. Sadly, those albums—*Blizzard of Ozz* and *Diary of a Madman*—would be Rhoads' only major releases during his short lifetime. We can, however, listen closely to Rhoads' playing on those records to get some insights into his magnificent style, technique, and creative process.

### Five-Note Flash

If being able to transform something quite ordinary into something spectacular is a sign of great artist, than Rhoads—with his transcendent use of the pentatonic scale—qualifies for such an accolade. Using the standard minor-pentatonic scale in **Ex. 1**, Rhoads came up with several exhilarating patterns. One was to descend in triplets while repeating every third note of the scale, as in **Ex. 2**. This—along with a pull-off between the second and third note of each triplet—helped Rhoads achieve an intriguing delayed-echo sound.

Rhoads also found that a repeating slur has a striking sound, as in **Ex. 3a's** sextuplets. Like an evolved version of Jimmy Page's trademark pentatonic descent in Led Zepelin's "Good Times Bad Times," this lick employs six-note groupings that feature a repeated pull-off between the first two pitches. Don't forget to try an ascending version of this phrase, such as **Ex. 3b**.

### Strike Two

Rhoads also injected new mojo into the pentatonic scale by striking each pitch twice, while ascending with an alternate-picking pattern. With a touch of palm-muting for that

metal-approved *chug*, try **Ex. 4**, which is still an *E* minor pentatonic riff, though it starts with the 3rd finger at the 12th fret of the bottom string.

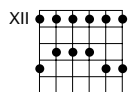
### Repeat Offenders

Rhoads also had fun with chromaticism. While **Ex. 5** isn't chromatic in and of itself (the *B $\flat$*  being accepted as the *b5* "blues" note), Rhoads would loop this type of move and shift it down a half-step with each repeat, creating an aggressive chromatic descent against the background harmony.

Another slippery Rhoads-style repeater is **Ex. 6**. Rhythmically speaking, nailing the *Geighth-note*

**Ex. 1**

E minor pentatonic scale



**Ex. 3a**

Ex. 3a is a musical notation for a guitar riff in E minor. It features a series of sextuplets (groups of six notes) on the top string, with a 'simile' instruction indicating a similar pattern. The fret numbers for the sextuplets are 15-12-15-12, 15-12-15-12, and 14-12-14-12-14-12. The riff concludes with a sixteenth-note pattern: 14-12-14-12-14-12-14-12-14-12-14-12-14-12-15-12-12.

**Ex. 2**

Ex. 2 is a musical notation for a guitar riff in E minor. It features a series of triplets on the top string, with a pull-off between the second and third notes of each triplet. The fret numbers for the triplets are 12-15-12-12, 14-12-12, and 14-12-12. The riff concludes with a triplet: 14-12.

on each downbeat is easy, but if you have any trouble phrasing the subsequent *E-D-E* triplet, try saying *tri-puh-let* aloud as you play it.

## Aeolian Nation

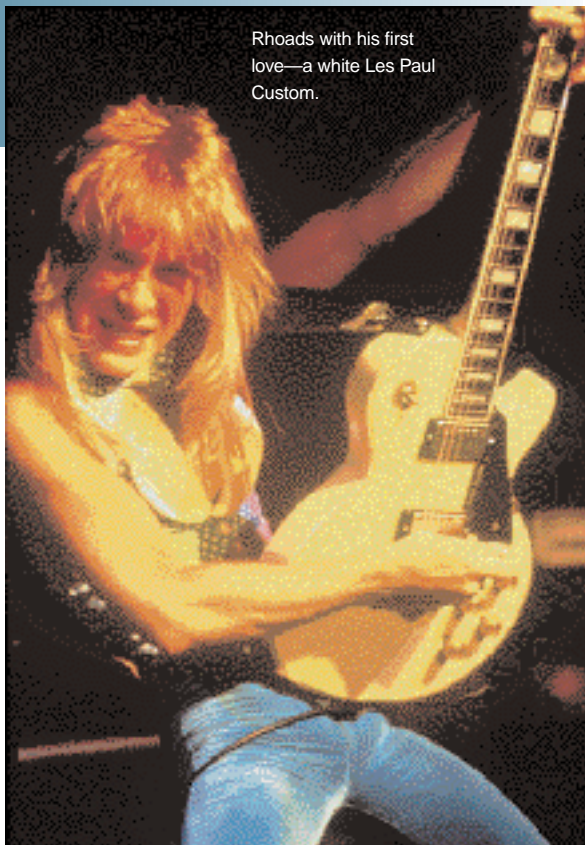
One way Rhoads introduced classical flavors into hard rock was to solo using modes common to the Baroque period of Western composition. Though newer generations of rock guitarists take this approach for granted, it was radical at the time. In particular, Rhoads helped popularize the Aeolian mode. Also known as the natural minor scale, Aeolian includes the five-note pentatonic scale within it. Starting on *G*, the 3 in *E* minor, **Ex. 7** illustrates how Rhoads would ascend the scale in triplets. Placing three notes on each string, he sometimes picked

the first note and hammered the next two for a legato effect. He also practiced the scale in different positions, as illustrated by the upward jump in bar 2.

## Rhoads Scholar

Rhoads didn't live to see the legions of guitarists who would touched by his music. Analyzing his signature guitar riffs will help you obtain some of his skills, but an even better goal is to use these examples to conjure new exercises. This way, you'll continue his legacy rather than simply mimicking it.

*Ken Steiger is the resident metal instructor at G.I.T. in Los Angeles, California. Check out his dangerous new instra-metal album at [projectsteiger.com](http://projectsteiger.com).*



Rhoads with his first love—a white Les Paul Custom.

**Ex. 3b**

Em

**Ex. 4**

Em

**Ex. 5**

Em

**Ex. 6**

Em

**Ex. 7**

Em