



How to Solo Over Uncommon Chord Changes (Example - Key of E)

Hello friends,

In this three-part lead guitar tutorial, I'll be explaining my approach to soloing over "uncommon" chord changes; these are transitions that feature chords outside of a typical major or minor key.

We'll begin by reviewing the chords that are in the key of Emaj, and how to solo over them. Last, I'll explain how considering the chord tones can help you to perform over a tricky chord change like E to G# major. In the process, I'll be showing you two very useful licks that you can apply to songs like "Hard Times" by Ray Charles, and "Living with the Blues" by Brownie McGhee. Let's get started!

1) What Are the Common Chords in the Key of Emaj?

The chords in the key of E major can be determined by performing the E major Scale:

E, F#, G#, A, B, C#, D#, E
W W H W W W H

Once you have determined the notes in the key of E, they can be converted to the following chord progression in which all the chords contain notes found in the scale, let's memorize these chords and the notes inside of them:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Emaj	F#m	G#m	Amaj	Bmaj	C#m	D#dim	Emaj
E	F#	G#	A	B	C#	D#	E
G#	A	B	C#	D#	E	F#	G#
B	C#	D#	E	F#	G#	A	B

2) What's the Simplest Way to Solo Over These Chords?

Soloing over these changes is easy with the E major, or major pentatonic scale. No adjustments to the scale need to be made for any of the changes, because the notes in each chord can be found in the scale.

	Major Scale	Major Pentatonic Scale
E	-----9-11-12-----	-----9-12-----
B	-----9-10-12-----	-----9-12-----
G	-----8-9-11-----	-----9-11-----
D	-----9-11-----	-----9-11-----
A	-----9-11-12-----	-----9-11-----
E	-----12-----	-----12-----



3) How to Adjust to Uncommon Changes - Example Emaj to G#maj:

- While the common chords of the E Major Scale are more or less guaranteed to sound good together, songwriters often add "uncommon changes" to their compositions for more flavor. One of my favorite examples of this is the major 1 - 3 transition, which in the key of E would be Emaj to G#maj.
- Changing the three chord in the key Emaj from G#m to G#maj means we must adjust our scale to include it's major third, the note C.
- Now, instead of playing the note B in our licks, we must replace that note for C. Here is one lick, first shown as it would be played over the common chord change of E to G#m, then adjusted for the G#maj variation:

	Emaj	G#m
E	-----	-----
B	-----	-----12v--
G	-----9-(11)/13-----	-----9-(11)/13-----
D	-----9-11-----	-----9-11-----
A	-----	-----
E	-----	-----
	1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & a..	

	Emaj	G#maj
E	-----	-----
B	-----	-----13v--
G	-----9-(11)/13-----	-----9-(11)/13-----
D	-----9-11-----	-----9-11-----
A	-----	-----
E	-----	-----
	1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & a..	

4) Simple Blues Licks for Emaj to G#maj:

Lick #1 would best be described as a basic major pentatonic lick, while lick #2 utilizes both notes from the major scale, but also the C note found inside that G#maj chord.

	Emaj	G#maj
E	-----	-----
B	-----	-----13-----
G	-----9-11-12b(13)-9-11-----9v-----9-11-9--(11)/13---(13)\11v--9-----	-----9-11-9--(11)/13---(13)\11v--9-----
D	-----/11-----11-----	-----11-9h10-9h10-----
A	-----	-----
E	-----	-----
	4 & a 1	