

The Magnificent 7 Practice Plan

#1) Rhythm Practice: This is super important. If your rhythm playing isn't good, it will not only affect your soloing, but it will make you a less desirable jam partner. Start by getting really good at 2 or 3 songs, playing through them regularly, and add a song or 2 once you've memorized those. Really get your Pompé strong and steady with a nice bouncy swing.

#2) Basic Arpeggio Practice: Mastering arpeggios is vital. Get really good at the major and minor arpeggios primarily. Adding the 7ths and 6ths can be beneficial, though not extremely vital as many django style licks and phrases already add the sevenths so you'll be practicing those already if you're learning phrases and licks as well.

#3) Arpeggio Étude Practice: This is VITAL to improvisation, ESPECIALLY if you're switching from playing rock or blues, as I will explain more in the arpeggio étude chapter. Play the basic arpeggios up and down over the changes of a song you're working on, in every "zone" of the fretboard. Take it from me, you can know all the licks, phrases, and Django solos in the world, but if you can't play the basic arpeggios over the changes, you won't be able to use them in your actual soloing.

#4) Licks & Phrases: Learn many Django style licks & phrases note for note, practice them in many keys, tweak them, alter their rhythm, etc. Get your licks and phrases from this book, Gonzalo's books, Dennis Chang's DVD's, Givone's books, Gypsy Fire, Robin Nolan's books, online, etc. There is NO shortage of resources out there for great licks and phrases, and they're invaluable, though worthless if you can't figure out how to apply them. More on that in the next element.

#5) Lick & Phrase Connecting/Étude Creation: Take all the licks and phrases that you know how to play, and piece them together into a solo over the song(s) you're working on. There will be much more on this in the chapter on Phrase etudes, but basically, create your own original solos using your phrases. Create it out of time and then practice to a playalong track of the song. Create 3 or 4 etudes for EVERY song you're working on (especially in the beginning).

#6) Diminished Scales, The Harmonic Minor Scale, And Enclosure Tones: These 3 elements are used for creating Django like phrases and should be well practiced and memorized. Try picking at least one of the 3 elements and practice it at any given time in your development. You will find them to be invaluable "NOTE MAPS" for gypsy phrasing. You will also discover that many licks and phrases in books and online resources out there use these elements.

#7) Improvisation Practice Over Play Alongs/Jam With Friends: Put your knowledge to the test. Just DO it. Start with SLOW play alongs, and work your way up to fast.