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Chapter 2

Warming Up

There is a lot of information available on how to strengthen your chops but very little on how to warm up properly. And though everyone knows you need to practice to become a better player, very few methods teach you the correct way to practice—how to achieve optimum results in the shortest amount of time. After all, in any discipline, be it music, art, or athletics, you have to have the fundamentals wired. If you don't, anything you learn beyond that point will just be added onto a shaky foundation.

I feel it's absolutely essential to warm up before playing a gig or a session. Would a sprinter run a 100-yard dash before stretching? Would a football player subject his body to the grueling sport week after week without being totally limber and loose before every game? No way! The risk of injury—pulling or tearing a muscle (or worse)—is too great.

The same thing applies to playing the guitar. Believe it or not, playing long, intricate, or fast passages can be very stressful on the tendons and ligaments in your hands. The last thing you want to do is hurt your hands—just ask some of the guitarists whose careers have been cut short by tendonitis.

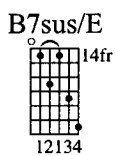
If my hands are cold or stiff, I find that playing chords—particularly those that require some stretching—really loosens them up. Once my hands are a bit more limber, I'll play some single-note exercises designed to synchronize the left and right hands.

Example 1:

Here's one stretching exercise I use to warm up before every gig: I start out by playing the B7sus/E chord shape in the fourteenth position, as shown in Figure 2. Then I simply move that shape down the neck, arpeggiating it at each position I stop. I start the exercise in the higher register of the neck because the frets are closer together, which makes the stretches more manageable at first. As you move down the neck, the frets are spaced farther and farther apart, making the chords harder to finger. This enables the left hand to gently and gradually stretch out. Example 1 depicts the whole exercise. Let every note ring out as clearly as possible—no buzzes allowed!

Notice that I don't move the chords down chromatically. Rather, I shift the 7sus shape to positions where the voicing sounds good to my ears. I also let the open low E string ring under each chord, which creates a cool modal sound.

Figure 2:



The musical notation for Example 1 consists of two systems of music. The first system starts with a CD icon and the number 2. It features a treble clef and a 4/4 time signature. The melody is written on a single staff, and the fretboard positions for the left hand are indicated on three staves labeled T (Treble), A (Acoustic), and B (Bass). The chords are: B7sus/E, A7sus/E, G7sus/E, and F#7sus/E. The second system starts with the number 5 and continues with the chords: E7sus/E, D7sus/E, C#7sus/E, and B7sus/E. The notation shows the melodic line and the fretboard positions for the left hand (T, A, B strings).