



# Wylde at Heart

## Unleash your inner guitar hero with Zakk Wylde's show-stopping riffs

Photos & text by Jude Gold

**IF THE PHRASE** "less is more" were a can of beer, Zakk Wylde would crack it open against his skull, guzzle the contents, and then crush the empty aluminum shell with one hand. Next, staring menacingly at the crowd like a caged lion, the ferocious guitarist would launch into a cadenza of blistering blues licks, lightning-fast single-note runs, apocalyptic diminished flurries, and bone-crushing detuned passages—all delivered through walls of Marshall full-stacks so huge, they're probably visible from space. Wylde is a maximalist to the core, and every time the larger-than-life guitarist steps onstage, he proves conclusively that *more* is, in fact, still more.

Asked what it takes to rock tens of thousands of screaming metalheads, Wylde replies, "You gotta go out there and beat some ass." And, twice a day, that's exactly what he does at Ozzfest. First, he'll play a rowdy set fronting his own band, Black Label Society. Later, when darkness falls, he'll hit the stage again to deliver his explosive guitar heroics with Ozzy Osbourne.

Despite his over-the-top onstage persona, Wylde is an inspiring player who has forged a unique, high-octane brand of lead guitar from metal, blues, classical, and even chicken pickin'. His tremendous dedication to practicing has yielded amazing dividends in the raw chops department. Let's pretend the wild guitarist from New Jersey has just invited you onto his tour bus and handed you a gorgeous '58 Les Paul

reissue and a cold brew. Now, get ready to explore his fiery riffs.

### Pent-Up Aggression

"A lot of what I play is based on pentatonic scales," explains Wylde, as he uses standard fingering to fret the B minor pentatonic scale in Ex. 1. The fireworks begin in Ex. 2, where Wylde applies a repeating six-note pattern to the scale using alternating pick strokes. Once you get the moves down, try playing the sixteenth-notes as *sextuplets*—six notes per downbeat. If you've noticed there is no tempo marking, that's simply because Wylde—as he does with almost all of the examples in this lesson—plays this pattern as fast as is humanly possible.

"To get fast on guitar," he advises, "you just have to play everything a million times. It's a matter of repetition and practice. If you don't use it, you'll lose it."

### BlueFlames

"Sometimes burning through scales sounds too mechanical—like finger exercises," observes Wylde. "That's why I have always loved bluesy rock players like Frank Marino and Robin Trower. To me, blues stuff sounds more like music."

To illustrate, Wylde shifts the pentatonic box up to E minor and plays Ex. 3—one of his favorite phrases. The blue tinge comes from the

b5 (B $\flat$ ), which makes several appearances in this lick. Use your 4th finger only to fret the highest note, A. To get this example up to speed, try looping it, as Wylde does when he's practicing. (Notice that the last four pitches are identical to the first four, which makes bar 2's fourth beat a great place to restart the phrase.)

Wylde demonstrates an even more astounding blues-inflected lick in Ex. 4, which gains an edgy chromaticism from both the  $\flat 3$  (G $\sharp$ ) and the juicy, sliding tritone (bar 2, *and* of beat one). Played fast *or* slow, this tasty lead is sonic gravy for the ears.

### The Secret Weapon

When Wylde is moving his extra-heavy Dunlop Tortex pick at full throttle, a hummingbird's wings seem slow by comparison. But when you hear those blazing riffs pouring out of Wylde's signature Marshall heads, realize that sometimes the guitarist is employing a sneaky trick more common to Nashville pickers than balls-to-the-wall metal mongers.

"I often throw in notes plucked by my picking hand's middle finger," he reveals, playing Ex. 5 while slightly dampening the strings with the heel of his picking hand. "It's a chicken pickin' thing that allows you to skip strings without sacrificing speed. Here, I'm flatpicking the open fifth string, hammering with my 2nd finger, and plucking the open fourth string

with my middle finger. It's a repeating pattern. You can also include fretted notes on the fourth string [plays Ex. 6]. Or, *start* with a plucked note and then pull off [plays Ex. 7]."

Things get even more exciting in Ex. 8, where Wylde switches from triplet sixteenth notes to straight sixteenths. This head-turning riff covers three strings and sounds like a true knuckle-buster, but is actually easy to play. It's characteristic of Wylde's steel-string playing, which you can hear in solo acoustic pieces on the Black Label Society albums *1919 Eternals* and *Sonic Brew* [Spitfire Records].

### Classic Riffs

To practice this hybrid picking/plucking attack, try looping the classical motif Wylde plays in Ex. 9. In this phrase—which is inspired by the Isaac Albéniz piece "Leyenda"—every other note is a plucked, open B string. These open notes function as upper pedal tones against the descending B Phrygian line.

"I like to try flamenco-sounding ideas, as well," says Wylde, playing Ex. 10. In the key of D minor, this triplet pattern includes several middle-finger plucks.

### General Lee

"I loved Randy Rhoads," says Wylde of his legendary predecessor in the Osbourne guitar chair. "Anybody from my generation and in my genre who says they didn't is full of it. But having blond hair, a Les Paul, and being heavily influenced by classical music, I didn't want to be seen as a Randy clone. Ozzy told me, 'Just be yourself.' But that's hard to do when you don't know who you are. Then I saw an Albert Lee video."

Lee's snappy twang and mind-boggling hybrid picking inspired Wylde to inject those sounds into his hard-rocking solos. In Ex. 11, Wylde

plays a vicious blues move where, once again, he uses his picking hand's middle finger to eliminate string skips. The double-stops in bar 2 are plucked with the middle and ring (*a*) fingers.

### Two-Hand Terror

"I *do* play finger-taps," admits Wylde, "but that's mostly when I'm playing stuff that Randy wrote for solos like 'Crazy Train' and 'Flying High Again.'"

Interestingly, one of Wylde's bluesiest—and *slowest*—phrases is the two-handed E minor pentatonic bender in Ex. 12. He begins with a whole-step pre-bend on the third string at the

14th fret, which he slowly releases, pulling off to the 12th fret. Next, he taps at the 21st fret with the picking hand middle finger, gradually bending this note up a whole-step before pulling it off to a pre-bent B that slowly drops to A.

### Deep Issues

"I don't use many crazy tunings," explains Wylde, "because I don't want to drastically alter the way the scales run on the fretboard. Most often, I simply lower my sixth string to D or B."

When dropping the low string a perfect fourth to B, Wylde uses an ultra-heavy .070

from one of his GHS signature series sets. With a string this fat, low power chords sound utterly brutal. Even if you don't detune your guitar to play the B5 in Ex. 13, be sure to test-drive Wylde's chunky strumming pattern. This is one instance where he *doesn't* use alternating pick strokes, opting instead for a meaty *down-up-down-down* picking sequence.

### Oh Solo Mio

"It's about seven minutes long," says Wylde, describing the length of the extended guitar cadenza he takes during every Osbourne set.

Ex. 1

B minor pentatonic scale

Ex. 2

Nimbly Bm

Ex. 3

Fluidly Em 8va

Ex. 4

Explosively Em 8va

Ex. 5

Galloping Dm



Ex. 6

Dm

Ex. 7

Em

Ex. 8

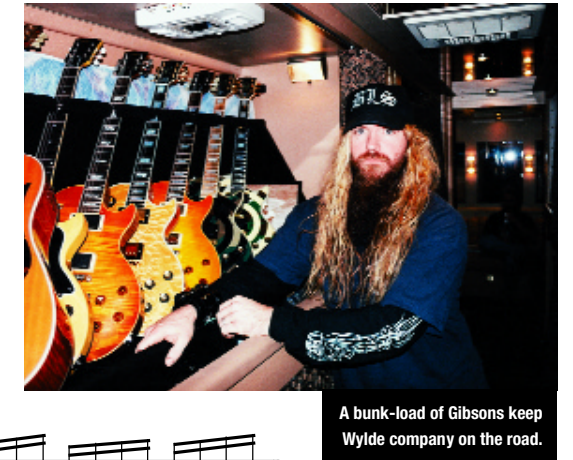
Hypnotically Em7

Ex. 9

Evenly Bm

Ex. 10

Quickly Bb



**Ex. 11**

Aggressively

Musical notation for Ex. 11, featuring a treble clef, 4/4 time signature, and a bass clef. The treble staff shows a melodic line with triplets and slurs. The bass staff shows a bass line with fret numbers. A guitar diagram shows a B5 chord with a palm mute.



**Ex. 12**

Slowly

Musical notation for Ex. 12, featuring a treble clef, 4/4 time signature, and a bass clef. The treble staff shows a melodic line with slurs and a guitar diagram for an Em chord.

**Ex. 13**

♩ = 84-100  
Brutally, w/palm mute

Musical notation for Ex. 13, featuring a treble clef, 4/4 time signature, and a bass clef. The treble staff shows a melodic line with slurs and a guitar diagram for a B5 chord.

**Ex. 14**

With authority Em

Musical notation for Ex. 14, featuring a treble clef, 3/4 time signature, and a bass clef. The treble staff shows a melodic line with slurs and a guitar diagram for an Em chord.

**Ex. 15**

Forcefully  $\sim$ dim F#dim Bdim

Musical notation for Ex. 15, featuring a treble clef, 4/4 time signature, and a bass clef. The treble staff shows a melodic line with slurs and a guitar diagram for a Bdim chord.

**Ex. 16**

Insanely fast E7#9

Musical notation for Ex. 16, featuring a treble clef, 4/4 time signature, and a bass clef. The treble staff shows a melodic line with slurs and a guitar diagram for an E7#9 chord.

**Ex. 17**

Chaotically Dm

Musical notation for Ex. 17, featuring a treble clef, 4/4 time signature, and a bass clef. The treble staff shows a melodic line with slurs and a guitar diagram for a Dm chord.

“Ozzy and the rest of the band take a break. I start off with my wah and RotoVibe pedals and take it from there. It’s mostly simple stuff, but it sounds great. A lot of it is repeating licks, like this [plays Ex.14]. Then, I might go into some diminished stuff [plays Ex.15], moving up one string at a time. When I get to the highest pair of strings, I alternate back and forth between the two [plays Ex.16]. I like that random sound—it almost sounds computer generated.”

Ex.17 is our final fast-and-furious Wylde pattern. Thanks to a 3rd-finger hammer and pull, this feisty repeater is easy on the picking hand. For a hypnotic effect, at the beginning of each new measure, lower this lick one fret. Just remember: Like all the examples in this lesson, what this riff requires most is not chops, but conviction.

“You have to play with muscle, passion, and a huge set of balls,” says Wylde. “I’ll always love listening to great guitarists. Great players and great playing will never go out of style.”

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