

Guitar Nine (guitar9.com)

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7 Strings Good, 6 Strings Bad

by Guy Pople

Most serious guitarists have given the 7-string guitar some thought. Certainly there is no shortage of opinion in the press. The 6-string purists are generally discouraging but I say ignore the naysayers! How many of them have actually sat down in private and had an honest session on 7 strings? Anyone with an inquiring mind who takes the time to do this will be inspired. If it has ever crossed your mind to have a go, or you just feel vaguely dissatisfied with 6 strings, then read on...

Aspiring 7-stringers should consider some important pros and cons before taking the plunge:

The Cons

- Investing huge amounts of practice time and mental energy overcoming the daunting hurdles resulting from an extra bass string and a broader neck.
- Significant initial financial outlay. Quality 7-strings don't come cheap, although I can recommend the Ibanez RG1527 for starters. Additional expenses include custom strings, dedicated amplifiers and microphones.
- Repetitive blows to your ego as you are demoted to beginner status for a while.
- A shortage of serious literature and proficient tutors.
- The fear of failure and the jeers from the herd.

The Pros

- The challenge and excitement of being on the cutting edge of guitar. There is nothing quite like an extra string to break you out of a rut.
- Its flexibility and adaptiveness to all genres. Jazz, avant-garde and classical players alike were using them years before the 'nu-metalheads' and everyone's favourite Mr Vai jumped on the bandwagon.
- The possibilities afforded by a wider range of notes and the 7th string's unique timbre are profound for improvisation and composition.
- The potential for new chord voicings and unique tunings.
- Manufacturers are producing more models (they are becoming increasingly affordable too!) and more signed artists are getting with it.
- After a heavy session on the 7-string, your 6string will seem a hell of a lot easier.

For me, the pros outweigh the cons. If you are still interested and have access to the real thing, take a turn through this basic 7-string starter pack. It is a set of essential exercises designed to address the initial obstacles and set your development in motion.

1. Incorporating the new string

Familiarizing your hands with an extra string requires sustained determination and disciplined work but if you invite the new string to play, it will surely join in. Below is a chromatic scale followed by an Am add9 chord. Tune to 7A, keep your eyes on your fretting hand, and set a metronome going. These tasks are designed to expose the mind and fingers to the 7-string's full range of notes and overcome the basic technical hurdles i.e. teaching your picking hand about the new bass string and your fretting hand about the

increased width of the board.

A CHROMATIC SCALE

A major 69

2. Tuning

For the most part I tune my 7th to an A i.e. 7A 6E 5A 4D 3G 2B 1E. I do this to throw a bit of variety into 'standard tuning'. We already have four intervals of a 4th (6E-5A, 5A-4D, 4D-3G, 2B-1E), one of a third (3G-2B) and if you go for 7A you now have one of a fifth (7A-6E). Most production 7s come with 7B as standard because this is the most logical choice based on standard tuning.

3. Suggestions

- Try moving bass notes from your existing chords onto the 7th.
- Learn all the note names of the 7th.
- Learn all intervals flowing from the 7th.
- Experiment with the gauge and tuning of the 7th.
- Check any new microphone or speaker you buy covers the 40Hz upwards range of the 7.

Obviously the 7-string guitar is not for everyone. Taming the 7-string is not an idle pastime. Most folk are secure and satisfied with their 6string. The 7-string guitar is not for the herd- it is an instrument for the creative and experimental individuals among you. Sure, there are plenty of 7-stringers who could benefit from a little more 6string practice, and who could arguably achieve the same results in their playing from detuning a 6string; but there are equally as many who are forging ahead and pushing the boundaries.

Read the standard version of this column online at: <https://www.guitar9.com/columnist463.html>

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