

Guitarists of Megadeth

A Classic Metal Onslaught's Inner Workings

By Troy Stetina

IN 1983, after getting unceremoniously booted out of the embryonic [Metallica](#), guitarist Dave Mustaine formed [Megadeth](#). In the nearly 25 years since then, his band has proved to be a defining force in metal, as well as a shred bonanza—the lead guitar slot has been occupied by no less than seven exceptional players.

Early Megadeth lineups included guitarist Kerry King ([Slayer](#)), among others, but by the time of the band's first album, *Killing Is My Business...And Business Is Good!* (1985), Chris Poland was on board, and he remained so for the 1986 followup, *Peace Sells...But Who's Buying?* (1986). A multi-faceted player with deep jazz-fusion roots, Poland was, and is, capable of playing expertly anything he could dream up, no matter how demanding. His immediate successor was Jeff Young, followed in 1990 by Marty Friedman, who'd previously partnered with fellow shredder Jason Becker in the instrumental group Cacophony. Friedman's decade with the band is seen by many as Megadeth's "golden era." The music evolved from its early thrashiness toward heavier, more approachable, and often more moderately paced grooves, while Friedman's soloing finesse earned him well-deserved status as a master metal technician. Like Poland, Friedman always seems to serve the melody first; his solos are tightly structured, with an excellent sense of pacing.

After the millennium, lead duties in Megadeth fell to Al Pitrelli (*Trans-Siberian Orchestra*, *Savatage*) for several albums. In 2004, Chris Poland returned briefly to add solo work to *The System Has Failed*. And the band's upcoming *United Abominations*, currently scheduled for a May 2007 release, features the latest player to join the fray, Glen Drover (*Eidolon*, *King Diamond*).



Chris Poland

Fig. 1 is a lick similar to Marty Friedman's melodic solo entrance in "Lucretia" (*Rust in Peace*). It's a good example of how you can hug the chord tones of a progression, decorated with well-placed passing tones and subtle shifts of tonality. Note the temporary F# major arpeggio (F#-A#-C#), which breaks up the prevailing F#m feel. Also, over the E, the coloration is distinctly minor instead of the expected Mixolydian (which would be natural to the key of

FIG. 1 • Play this line with even alternate picking, except where slides and hammer/pulls interrupt it. The tempo here should be quick but not blazing.

♩ = 96

F#5 E5 D5

T
A
B

FRANK WHITE

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to the key of F# minor). The use of displaced octaves in measure 2 adds further interest, while in measure 3 we see Bm superimposed over D5, another fusion move that implies a Dm6 chord.

Chris Poland's lead approach gets a showing in Fig. 2, based on his solo in "The Scorpion" (The System Has Failed). Smoothly controlled vibrato and bending, along with precise left-hand execution, gives Poland's playing a smoother, "West Coast" sound.

Although Glen Drover's overall style occupies territory similar to Friedman's and Poland's, he tends toward more intense speed lines, as can be heard in his recent work with Eidolon. Fig. 3 gives a sample of this flashier approach, moving a single basic fret-hand shape (with a few variations) through several positions for a full-scale shred assault. The tricky part here is the rhythm. Follow

FIG. 2 • Like the solo in "The Scorpion," this figure pulls from B Phrygian dominant. In measure 3, the diminished 7th arpeggios over B produce a B7:9 color.

Shred Supplements

Megadeth has gone through many incarnations, but its music has stayed remarkably consistent. Standout albums from the Marty Friedman period include *Rust in Peace* (1990), *Countdown to Extinction* (1992), and *Youthanasia* (1994). In particular, listen to the songs "Hangar 18," "Lucretia," "Symphony of Destruction," "Countdown to Extinction," "Sweating Bullets," "Youthanasia," and "Train of Consequences." Chris Poland's best Megadeth work can be found on *Peace Sells...but Who's Buying?* (1986) and *The System Has Failed* (2004).

It's worth noting that in 2004, the band's entire catalog up to that point was reissued in remixed and remastered versions. In addition, check out Friedman's original Cacophony releases with Jason Becker, Poland's solo album *Return to Metalopolis*, and Glen Drover's work with Eidolon (*The Parallel Otherworld*), King Diamond (*House of God*), and Lion's Share.



each repetition of the pattern and you'll see that it repeats in a regular sequence, taking exactly one and 3/10 beats.

To get something like this down, first practice each shape paying no attention to the rhythm. After you can do every portion of the pattern, feeling a single downbeat on each repetition, then consider the hemiola-type rhythm above the staff. Feel that rhythm and drop the pattern repetitions right into it. This is a very advanced concept, so don't feel too bad if it gives you any problems—this is the Shred column; after all!

It will certainly be interesting to hear how Drover's lead style fits in with the new Megadeth. In the meantime, check out his recent blackmetal side project Lion's Share (lionsshare.org) for some more over-the-top, 21st-century shred.

FIG. 3 • The overall E diminished tonality here comes from using both the half-whole and whole-half scales, but it's the rhythm that makes this so challenging.