

Major Scales

The major scale is like the DNA of music because everything we do in music relates back to the major scale in some way. Knowing the theory and application of it is very important. While the ability to master major scales is a huge undertaking for guitarists, this lesson will only deal with a portion of the practical aspect of them.

Many players use scales for building technique, warming up before a practice session or a performance, soloing, etc. No matter how you are going to use them, a good solid foundation of all the major scales covering the whole guitar neck is required. Although I can't go over them all here, this article is just to get you started or moving ahead further.

Having the ability to know and play them well doesn't come overnight, it takes time and all players need to be patient in the quest of mastering them. It is best to begin by not using any tempo at all while getting your fingertips to slowly go on the right notes.

Your thumb should be in the middle of the neck with your fingers arched over the fretboard so you can easily play with your fingertips. It is important to get the fretting hand playing correctly otherwise moving the speeds up later will be very difficult.

Once you can play these exercises with no tempo, then begin with a very slow 40 beats per minute on your metronome and slowly build up from there being careful not to go too fast. Many people ask the question, "How do I know if I am going too fast?" My reply is, "If you are making any kind of mistakes like, buzzing or missing notes, fluctuating tempos, etc, then you are going to fast and need to slow it down until you can play the exercise flawlessly".

Ex 1. Is the G major scale in the second position that many people learn first. Take care with the fingering if you haven't played this scale before; your finger muscles might have to get used to the stretching as well. Picking should be strictly alternating, or if you are playing with fingers, strictly i, m, or m, a. Once you can play it well ascending, also play it descending.

Ex 1.

Fingering 2 4 1 2 4 1 3 4 1 3 4 2 4 1 2 3

T A B

3 5 2 3 5 2 4 5 2 4 5 3 5 2 3

Ex 2. Once you can play the major scale well it is a good idea to learn the scale using sequences. This exercise is a diatonic sequence moving up the scale in four note groups. Although there are many different sequences you can play, this one is an easy one to begin with. Also play this one descending.

Ex 3. This exercise is the major scale played using major and minor third intervals. Although a bit tricky it is a great way to improve your ability to improvise and get to know the fingerboard.

The image shows two musical examples. Example 2 consists of two measures of eighth-note patterns in G major (one sharp). Example 3 consists of three measures of sixteenth-note patterns in G major. Both examples are in common time. Below the music is a guitar neck diagram with fret numbers 3, 5, 2, 3, 5, 2, 3, 5 indicated on the strings. The strings are labeled T, A, B from top to bottom.

You will hear fragments of Ex 2 and 3 played by most of the great players in the world today so keep your ears open for them. Once you can play the exercises here, then it is time for you to investigate other major scale fingerings that cover the whole neck.

Happy Practising
Kevin.

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