

LEAD, MELODY AND IMPROVISATION

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

The goal of this chapter is to teach the student how to create music on the guitar in a precise, methodical and no-nonsense way. The essence of lead, melody and improvisation can be reduced to three elements: the major scale, the arpeggio and the blues scale. Within these three elements, we find countless variations. The other essential scales can be found within them. When learning these elements, not only will you be playing very great sounding riffs but also you will be examining what is occurring theoretically, exploring such concepts as scale and chord construction, intervals and other essential elements for mastering the guitar. After completing this chapter, you will understand how melodies are created, which notes sound good and why they sound good.

THE MAJOR SCALE

A scale is a group of musical notes collected in ascending and descending order. The major scale is the most important scale in music. The major scale can be played in 12 keys. Each of the 12 keys has different combinations of notes. In this chapter, we will discuss only the major scale in the key of C and the key of E. To learn more about scales visit guitarlessonsbybrian.com.

THE MAJOR SCALE IN THE KEY OF C

The major scale has seven notes. The notes are always in alphabetical order. The notes of the major scale in the key of C are C, D, E, F, G, A, B, C. The seven letters are given number names when referring to the intervals of the major scale. Therefore C is the 1st interval, D is the 2nd interval, E is the 3rd, and so on. It ends on C, an octave (8th) higher than it started. The prefix "oct" means eight. Therefore the eighth note, C, is called the octave.

The major scale is constructed with a combination of whole tones and semitones. A whole tone is the span of two frets. A semitone is the span of one fret. C to D is one whole tone. D to E is one whole tone, E to F is a semitone, F to G is one whole tone, G to A is one whole tone, A to B is one whole tone, and B to C is a semitone. Therefore, the intervals that create a major scale are: w, w, s, w, w, w, s (where "w" represents a whole tone, and "s" represents a semitone). There is a semitone between the 3rd and 4th intervals and a semitone between the 7th and 8th intervals. All other intervals of the major scale are a whole tone apart.

To give you a clear picture of the scale, we have several ways to visualize it below. The notes are shown on the first row, the intervals on the second row, the notation on the third row and the tablature on the fourth row. Then, following the rows, we have a diagram of the guitar neck to show how the intervals appear on the fret board.

notes	C	w	D	w	E	s	F	w	G	w	A	w	B	s	C
intervals	1		2		3		4		5		6		7		8

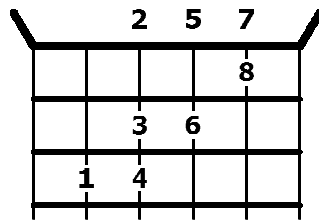
MAJOR TRIAD

The 1st, 3rd and 5th intervals of the major scale create a chord called *the major triad*. The prefix tri means three. A major triad is the smallest chord. Remember, the notes of a chord are played simultaneously.

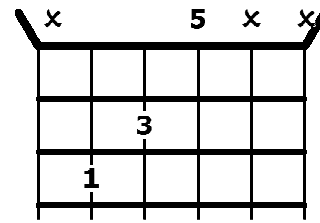
ARPEGGIOS

When the three notes of the major triad are played consecutively instead of simultaneously, it is called an arpeggio. Below we have both, the chord (triad) and *major arpeggio* illustrated. Notice the notes of the chord are played together while the notes of the arpeggio are played consecutively.

Below, we have the C scale and also the arpeggio beside it. Notice the intervals of the arpeggio (and triad) are the 1, 3, 5 of the major scale. It is very important to visualize these intervals on the neck of the guitar.



C scale



C triad and arpeggio

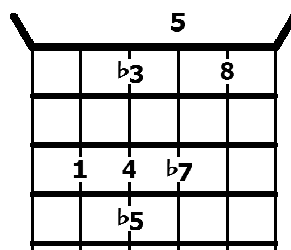
BLUES SCALE

The blues scale is one of the most important scales for playing melodies, lead guitar and improvising. When discussing the intervals of a blues scale or any other scale, you name the intervals as they relate to the major scale. For example, the blues scale has a $\flat 3$. This means if you compare the third interval of the blues scale to the third interval of the major scale, the 3 is a semitone lower in pitch or flat (\flat). This is why the blues scale has a $\flat 3$. Comparing the blues scale with the major scale, we find the blues scale has the intervals 1, $\flat 3$, 4, $\flat 5$, 5, $\flat 7$, 8.

Below we have the blues scale.

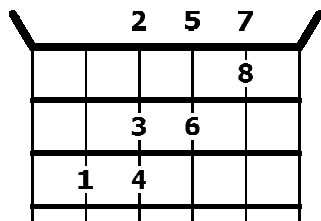
C	E \flat	F	G \flat	G	B \flat	C
1	$\flat 3$	4	$\flat 5$	5	$\flat 7$	8

Below is a diagram as the intervals appear on the neck of the guitar.

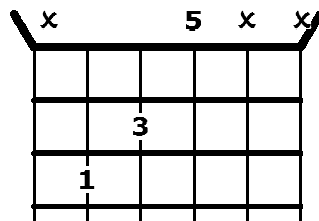


COMPARING THE SCALES

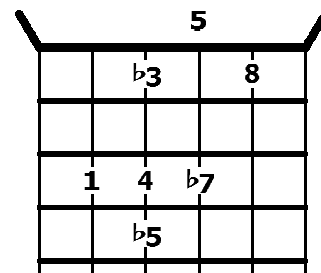
The major scale, major arpeggio and blues scale are the most important tools when playing melodies, lead guitar and improvising. Notice the similarities and the differences in these scales. The major scale and the blues scale both have the 1, 4, and 5 intervals. The blues scale is unique because it has a $\flat 3$, $\flat 5$, and a $\flat 7$. These three notes are called the blue notes because they are in the blues scale.



C major scale

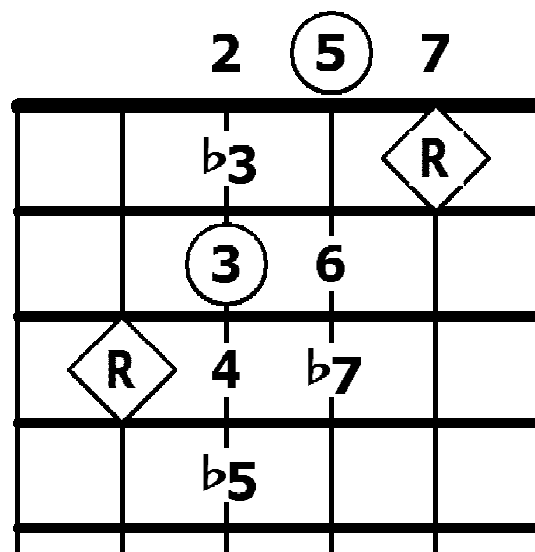


C chord and arpeggio



C blues scale

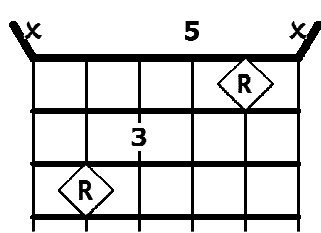
In the diagram below, I have superimposed all three of the above diagrams creating a "hybrid scale" or what I call the "interval map." These intervals are the most obvious notes for creating melodies, lead and improvisation. Notice the diamond with the R. This is the root note. The root note identifies the scale and arpeggio. The circled 3 and 5 are notes of the chord and arpeggio.



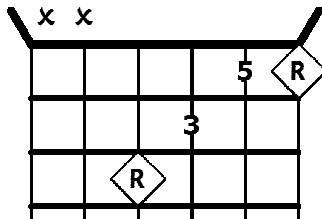
C interval map

CHANGE RUNNING

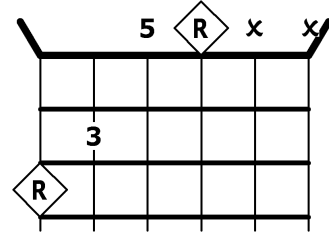
There are three basic chords in the key of C. They are C, F and G. F and G have corresponding scales and arpeggios just as C does. The same concepts used for C can also be applied to F and G. When playing a riff using intervals of the C scales, we can move to F and play the same pattern of intervals with the F scales. So when the chord changes to F, we run the scales in F. This technique is called change running. The diagrams below illustrate the chords and arpeggios for all three chords.



C chord and arpeggio

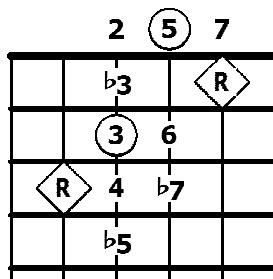


F chord and arpeggio

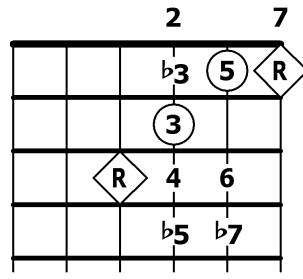


G chord and arpeggio

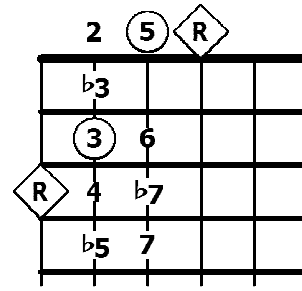
Below we see the interval maps (chords, arpeggios and scales combined) for each of the three chords.



C interval map



F interval map



G interval map

EXERCISES

The following exercises use variations of the major scales, major arpeggios and blues scales. These notes are the essence of lead guitar. The exercises methodically teach intervals and change running, so the guitarist understands how and why melodies are created. The form or chord progression of the exercises is the twelve bar blues, which is the most common form used in music in the western hemisphere. When playing the exercises, try to visualize the arpeggios (or chords) on the fretboard as you add the other intervals around the arpeggios. The exercises start with the arpeggios and add one interval at a time, so you will see how the intervals relate to the arpeggios. Notice exercises 1 and 3 use only quarter notes. The remaining exercises use only eighth notes. Remember to use alternating up and down pick strokes when playing eighth notes. These are not simply scale exercises. They are great melodies you hear in rock, jazz, blues, swing, country, rockabilly and folk styles. I'm sure you will enjoy these tunes. Have fun!