



The Guitar Method Based on the Laws of Body Learning

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February 16, 2010

Feature Article FingerBoard Harmony, Part Three: Diminished Triads



We have looked at the structure and shape of major triads and minor triads. Now, we will look at diminished triads.

The simplest way to understand the make-up of a major triad is to know that it is simply a set of 3 notes, and that those notes are the 1st, 3rd, and 5th note of any major scale you choose. The letter name of the scale you choose will be the letter name of the Major triad. So, if I choose the scale of A, which has the notes.....A B C# D E F# G#.....then I simply pick AC#E, and I have a major triad (I can also say I have a major chord). **So, the formula for a major triad is 1 3 5**

To make a minor, you simply take the same 1st, 3rd, and 5th notes, but you lower the 3rd one half step, so the the C# becomes C natural (C) **So, the formula for a minor triad is 1 b3 5**

Diminished triads take us one step further. We take the 1st note, we use that lowered 3rd note, BUT we lower the 5th note as well. So, in the key of A, we would have **A C Eb. So, the formula for a diminished triad is 1 b3 b5.**

Now, this is the technical, "mental" explanation. You also need to translate these concepts into ability in your fingers, and most especially, into recognition in your ear.

Fingers

As far as your fingers go, you will take the major triads, and play them as before around the circle of 5ths. As you play each one, you will then transform the major triad to minor by lowering the 3rd (adjusting the fingering). Then, you will turn that minor triad into a diminished triad by lowering the 5th (which is played by the 1st finger).

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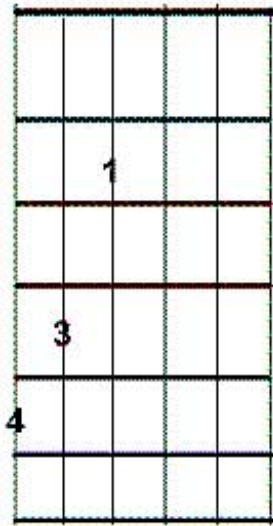
Ear

As you do this, playing a major-minor-diminished triad in succession, you will sing the notes as well. You can just sing "la" for each note, but it is probably better to sing 1-3-5, saying "flatted" where appropriate. Don't skip this part, all good musicians, all professional musicians train their ears this way, connecting them to their fingers as they do these type of drills. It may seem hard at first, it will soon become easier, then second nature.

Here is an example of the above described operation, done with the major triad from a 6th string root. Do each string set, of course around the circle of 5ths.

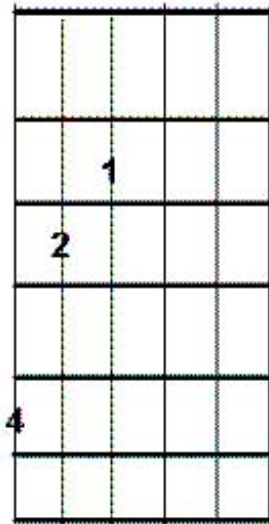
The Diminished Triad 1 b3 b5 of Major Scale

Major Triad
1-3-5 of Major Scale



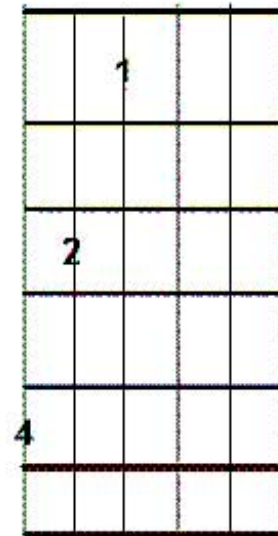
A-C#-E

Minor Triad
1-b3-5 of Major Scale



A-C-E

Diminished Triad
1-b3-b5 of Major Scale



A-C-Eb

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
A Major Scale A B C# D E F# G#

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The diminished triad, in terms of how it sounds and how it functions musically, can probably best be described as simply "weird". It is a very dissonant chord, a very unstable chord, and it does not want to remain as it is, but strongly wants to resolve to something else. Music, in essence, is "tension and release", and diminished chords belong to the "tension" part of the equation!

Last time, I had you do an "Integration Exercise" to learn the major and minor triad forms along the 4 string sets. We played a "chord scale" in C major (a series of chords, each one representing and built on a scale note)...

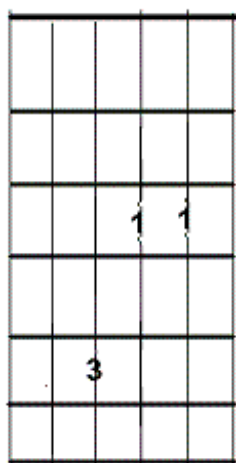
Cmaj-Dm-Em-Fmaj-Gmaj-Am

There are only 6 chords here, and there are 7 notes in the scale. We left out the chord that would correspond to the 7th note of the scale because it happens to be a diminished chord! So, this time, play the same chord scales, up and down each string set, but include the 7th chord as well.

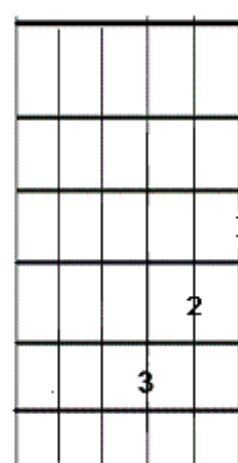
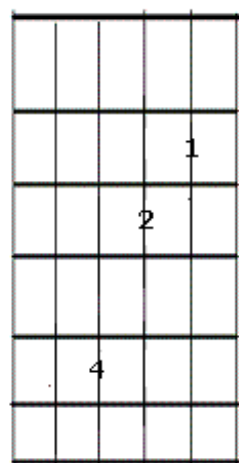
Cmaj-Dm-Em-Fmaj-Gmaj-Am -Bdim---and end on the higher C, then work back down.

Here are the fingerings to use for diminished triads on the other string sets, derived from the minor triads...

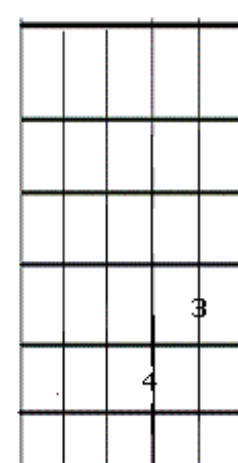
Fingerings For Diminished Triads



Minor--Diminished



Minor--Diminished



Next issue: 5 Fret Rule

Go to: [Introduction To FingerBoard Harmony](#)

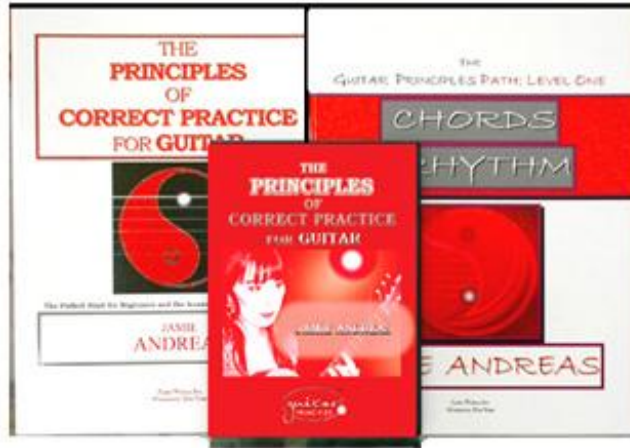
Go to: [FingerBoard Harmony, Part Two: Minor Triads](#)

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Q&A

Q&A: Why Use The Circle Of 5ths?

Hey Jamie,

I had a teacher once who taught me to play chords/scales using the circle of fifths, quite similar to how you advocate playing the triads using the circle of fifths.

My problem is that the person who taught me that later stopped teaching me and never got me to the point where I knew WHY he made me play things using the circle of fifths. Therefore, I have this seemingly useful tool that I do not know how to apply. You said in the newsletter that it takes a while to appreciate the circle of fifths and I was wondering if you could lead me in the right direction on what to study so that I can eventually put the technique to use.

Thanks Jamie,
Benny

Hi Benny,

The circle of 5ths will become clear to anyone who pursues a study of music theory in great depth, and this understanding will need to develop over time. Many things in life are like this. First, to understand the Circle of 5ths, the concept of tonality itself must be appreciated. The energy system created by tonal relationships and their effect on and connection with human emotions must be appreciated before the importance and usefulness of the organizational construct called the "circle of 5ths" can be fully grasped. Like many other things, as you study music theory diligently, the conception of the Circle of 5ths begins to materialize and fill out.

In the meantime, the good news is you don't need to understand it to use it. And the reason we use it here in practicing things like these arpeggios is actually not a musical reason. It is simply to create a structure for practice. You could learn all these arpeggios if you simply practiced them alphabetically, or backwards, or any other way. But, by using the circle, you are simply making sure you cover all the keys, and you are thinking about key signatures and so forth. You are also hearing the root movement move in 5ths, and if you go backward, in 4ths. That is a good thing for your ear to hear, because those harmonic movements are the primary chord movements in tonal music.

As a point of departure for your efforts to understand the circle, I will tell you a few brief facts which may help.

1. It is called the circle of 5ths because each letter to the right is 5 letters higher. Therefore, it represents the dominant of the key behind it. They are in a I-V relationship
2. Chords tend to move in root movement of 4ths because a 5th upside down is a 4th. (C to G is a 5th, G to C is a 4th.) So, G7 wants to go to C, as a V to its I. Each letter, if made a dominant 7th chord, will fall powerfully to the chord behind it. Going backward, we have the circle of 4ths. So, many chord progressions will follow the circle of 4ths, such as the ubiquitous I-VI-II-V, used in millions of songs. For example, in the chords G-Em-Am-D7. The E-A-D part is movement in 4ths.



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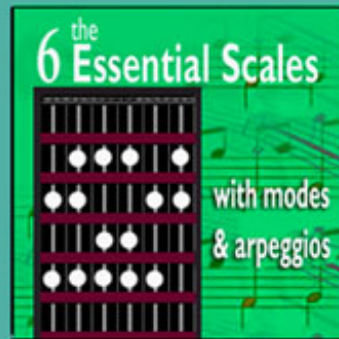
3. Each new letter in the circle is the next key in order of sharps, going from no sharps (C) to six sharps(F#). At the bottom (F#) we also call it Gb, and continue on using the enharmonic flat names (the next key is Db, not C#, because it avoids the cumbersome notation that would result from writing music in C#. Likewise, we use Ab instead of G#.

Happy practicing!
Jamie

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Article Attention & In-Attention

I was in a lesson the other day, and had a very typical experience with a student. In fact, you might say it was THE experience. It was THE experience that displays the fundamental condition that must be overcome in each of us, if we are to connect with our inner teacher, our **inner master**.

So the other day, I had THE experience, once again, of showing the student sitting in front of me that the reason she was having (and keeping) the "problem" she was having (building speed on the Walking Exercises) was because she was not paying ANY attention to what she was doing. Of course, she did not realize she was not paying attention, because she has not yet developed one of the skills of mastery: the ability to pay attention to your in-attention.

She was doing 1-4 across the strings, at 60 in 8th notes (playing a classical, so the neck is wide, and stretch demanding). She kept working up to the second string, and breaking down. Then, she would go back to the beginning, start all over, and break down in the same spot! Over and over and over. She would probably still be sitting there doing it if I didn't intervene!

Could you imagine walking down the road and tripping over a rock, and then going back to the beginning of the road, walking down the road again, and tripping over the same rock, again and again? Isn't it a better idea to stop when you get to the rock, and take a good hard look and a good hard think!

My student, Kathy, was not even LOOKING at her fingers, which was the first thing I pointed out. As she began to look at her fingers, and REALLY paying attention to what was going on, where the fingers were breaking down, what it looked like, what it felt like, she began to notice things, and she began to talk to herself out loud.

"Hmm, I think it has something to do with my thumb. My thumb doesn't feel comfortable."

"Oh, really" says I, "maybe you want to think about that a bit, maybe experiment a little"

"Hmm," says Kathy, "if I move my elbow out a little when I get to this spot it feels better. I notice how the pressure changes when I lift my 4th finger," etc. etc. and blah blah blah.

She started to reel off a such a long train of investigative thought, talking stream of consciousness, that I just sat back and listened, learning a lot myself!

And that, people, is what it is all about! If you can realize that when you are practicing and you are "stuck" that your "stuckness" is being held in place by your own RESPONSE to it (or lack thereof), then you are on the road to increasing your power as a practitioner and player.

Kathy was like a little car, with its nose up against a wall determinedly trying to go forward, but instead, just spinning her wheels and staying in the same place. I just came along and gave her a kick in the rear to get her

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back on the road! I didn't TELL her anything in terms of a solution to her problem, I just made her aware of the fact that she was "stuck" in the problem, instead of being busy finding a solution!

Now you know I would like to be there to kick you in the rear also when you get stuck, but you will have to learn to kick yourself! (And remember, recording yourself and listening back will almost always provide the "shock treatment" that will motivate you to face and pay more attention to the sounds you are REALLY making).

Good luck!

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Kees, a local of Woodstock, takes lessons on a regular basis for some one of a kind, in-person instruction from Jamie.

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Thanks for reading, and happy practicing!.....Jamie

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