

TUTION TIP: THE HARMONISED MAJOR SCALE

Hello and welcome to the third in the new series of Tuition Tips brought to you by Guitar-X – part of Tech Music Schools in London. For the full Tuition Tip archive including sound files and videos, visit the website: <http://www.guitar-x.co.uk> - Interact – Tuition Tips. Each issue I will be focussing on a specific class taught at the school, giving you a bite-size chunk of the lesson, and an insight into what it's like to be on a full-time course.

Well done to those of you who emailed me about the interval tunes from issue 34. 3a was the *God Save the Queen*, 3b *Star Wars* and 3c was *Somewhere Over the Rainbow*.

This time the featured lesson is **HARMONY & THEORY** from our One-Year Diploma course. When people come for assessments at the school we try to ascertain their level of theory knowledge. Most know the odd scale or arpeggio, but mentioning the harmonised major scale normally results in blank looks and much head scratching. If this applies to you then don't worry – this sort of knowledge isn't a pre-requisite for getting on a course. Whether you're looking to study bass at a college or not, learning the harmonised major scale is a great way of linking harmony and theory, and improving your knowledge of the fretboard.

First a bit of scene setting: You've all heard the words '**scale**' and '**key**' in relation to music. **SCALES** are sets of notes produced by playing up a specific sequence of intervals, e.g. tones and semitones (or whole steps and half steps). On the bass, a tone is a movement up two frets and a semitone is up one fret. The major scale is produced by the following sequence:

Tone – Tone – Semitone – Tone – Tone – Tone – Semitone

When people think about **KEYS** they normally get hung up on key signatures and ways of remembering them. Each key has a certain number of sharps and flats, there's an order, a way of writing them, various rhymes etc, etc, etc. But let's go back a step – what does it actually mean? "This song is in the key of G major," means it is *based on the notes in a G major scale*. That particular scale is treated as an available pool of notes from which melodies, harmonies and chords are drawn from, so in essence, scale and key mean the same thing.

The harmonised major scale is a way of finding out what chords are available to you in a particular key. The method is simple:

- Build a chord from each note in the scale, using only notes from the scale.

In this example we are going to build three-note chords (triads) from the scale of G major. *Table 1* shows the original scale at the bottom, the three-note chords built on top of each note in the scale, and at the top are the names of the chords that are produced.

You should notice that all of the notes in the table are notes from the original scale. *Figure 1* shows the chords displayed as notation.

What does this information tell us? That if you wish to stay completely in the key of G major, these are the seven chords to use:

1. G major
2. A minor
3. B minor
4. C major
5. D major
6. E minor
7. F# diminished

Staying within the confines of the key sounds harmonically correct and will limit clashes and tension. However, in many styles of music some tension is desirable, in which case there are other chords that can be used. Knowing what the safe options are first enables you to have control over the tension that is introduced.

One final point – as the intervallic structure of every major scale is the same, the list of chord *types* produced by harmonising the scale will be the same. As in, the first chord will always be major, the second minor, the third minor and so on. Try it in other keys to see for yourself.

Practice the *Exercise 1* on your bass – this will help you learn your triad shapes and the order of chords in the harmonised major scale.

Exercise 2 shows an alternative fingering for the same exercise that remains in one position as much as possible. There are many ways and positions this exercise can be played in. Experiment for yourself and see what you can come up with.

Any questions or thoughts about this article, or anything you'd like to see, email me on andrew@guitar-x.co.uk. See you next time!

TABLE 1

Chord produced	<i>G major</i>	<i>A minor</i>	<i>B minor</i>	<i>C major</i>	<i>D major</i>	<i>E minor</i>	<i>F# diminished</i>	<i>G major</i>
Notes in Triad	D	E	F#	G	A	B	C	D
	B	C	D	E	F#	G	A	B
	G	A	B	C	D	E	F#	G
SCALE/KEY	G	A	B	C	D	E	F#	G

FIGURE 1

Figure 1 shows a sequence of chords on a bass clef staff. The chords are: G, Am, Bm, C, D, Em, F#^o, and G. Each chord is represented by a triad of notes on the staff.

EXERCISE 1

Exercise 1 consists of two staves of musical notation in 3/4 time. The first staff contains four chords with fingerings: 1. G major (3-2-5-2-3), 2. A minor (5-8-7-8-5), 3. B minor (7-10-9-10-7), and 4. C major (8-7-10-7-8). The second staff contains four chords with fingerings: 5. D major (10-9-12-9-10), 6. E minor (12-15-14-15-12), 7. F# diminished (14-17-15-17-14), and 8. G major (15-14-17-14-15).

EXERCISE 2

1. G major 2. A minor 3. B minor 4. C major

5. D major 6. E minor 7. F# diminished 8. G major

The exercise is written in bass clef, 3/4 time. The first system contains measures 1-4, and the second system contains measures 5-8. Each measure corresponds to a chord and its fingering. The fingering patterns are as follows:

- 1. G major: 3 2 5 2 3
- 2. A minor: 5 3 2 3 5
- 3. B minor: 2 5 4 5 2
- 4. C major: 3 2 5 2 3
- 5. D major: 5 4 2 4 5
- 6. E minor: 2 5 4 5 2
- 7. F# diminished: 4 2 5 2 4
- 8. G major: 5 4 7 4 5