

## TUTION TIP: TRIADS IN DEPTH



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Skill Level:

When learning bass guitar, triads are often one of the first things people will look at if they are trying to improve their theory skills, fretboard knowledge and general technique. It doesn't take long to learn the four basic types (see below), and then you can move on to all the other chord types (7ths, 9ths, 11ths and 13ths plus alterations), pentatonic scales, all the modes, synthetic scales etc. etc. that you need to learn - man you've got a lot to get through! Triads are just the first rung on the ladder, they're the basic stuff, and they sound – well, basic! But that doesn't mean they should be dispensed with as quickly as possible and forgotten about.

In terms of learning and practicing music, everything should be viewed as a cycle. You will inevitably move on to other stuff, but don't forget to go back and explore old topics and always strive to take it to a deeper level. The thing with music, as you probably know, is that it's not about how much you know, but what you do with the information that counts. Getting to a deeper level with any topic means that you're more able to use that information in a musical context and be creative with it.

At Guitar-X we have courses at many different levels, from beginner, going right up to the Bachelor of Music Degree. On all of these courses we will cover the same four triads in lessons such as *The Fretboard*, *Instrument Techniques*, *Theory*, *Ear Training* and *Styles*. What is different on each course is the depth we go to, and the way it can be applied.

### BASIC LEVEL

A triad is a chord consisting of three different notes. There are four main types of triad, called *Major*, *Minor*, *Diminished* and *Augmented* (see TABLE 1).

### INTERMEDIATE LEVEL

In any position on the fretboard, play every occurrence of each of the three notes in the triad from lowest available to highest available. If you use a one-finger-per-fret spacing (no five-fret stretches), and discounting open strings for now, there are 5 possible shapes (see TABLE 2). The table shows the 5 shapes for major, and there are also 5 for minor, diminished and augmented – see if you can work them out.

Starting a triad on a note other than the root is called an *inversion*. If the third of the triad is at the bottom, it is called a *first inversion*. If the 5<sup>th</sup> of the triad is at the bottom, it is called a *second inversion*.

### ADVANCED LEVEL

To create more interest and variation with these triads, we don't need to start worrying about complex modes or any advanced theory. One of the simplest and most effective devices we

can use are called 'chromatic approach notes'. Quite simply, before each note in the triad, play the note a semitone/one-fret below (see EXERCISE 1). There are many possible permutations of this exercise, such as using the semitone above, or the notes from the scale above and/or below. One of the most musical and useful variations is to play the scale note above each triad note, a semitone below, then the triad note – referred to as a *surround* (see EXERCISE 2). These exercises can be applied to any of the 5 shapes for any of the 4 triads – lots of options!

As you can see, there are many possibilities with something even so simple as a triad. It's good to learn new things and push yourself further, but at the same time don't forget to re-examine the basics and explore them to new depths.

Any questions or thoughts about this article, or anything you'd like me to cover, email me on [andrew@guitar-x.co.uk](mailto:andrew@guitar-x.co.uk) - see you next time.

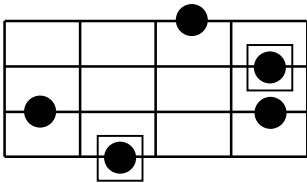

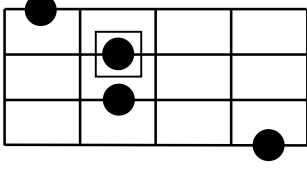

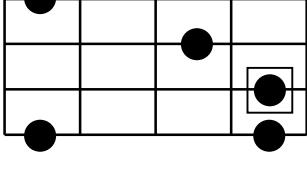

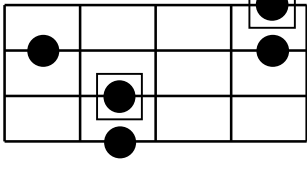

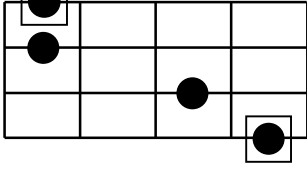

**TABLE 1 – THE FOUR TRIADS**

|                       | <b>MAJOR</b>                                    | <b>MINOR</b>                                    | <b>DIMINISHED</b>                                  | <b>AUGMENTED</b>                                  |
|-----------------------|---|---|--|---|
| Formula               | R – 3 – 5                                       | R – $\flat$ 3 – 5                               | R – $\flat$ 3 – $\flat$ 5                          | R – 3 – $\sharp$ 5                                |
| Intervals             | Major 3 <sup>rd</sup> , Perfect 5 <sup>th</sup> | Minor 3 <sup>rd</sup> , Perfect 5 <sup>th</sup> | Minor 3 <sup>rd</sup> , Diminished 5 <sup>th</sup> | Major 3 <sup>rd</sup> , Augmented 5 <sup>th</sup> |
| Notation & TAB (in C) |   |   |  |   |
| Shape                 |   |   |  |   |

NOTE 1: It is standard to repeat the root note at the top of the triad.

NOTE 2: For the shapes, the horizontal lines represent the strings, the dots with boxes are the root notes, and they only cover three strings as that's all they need!

**TABLE 2 – MAJOR TRIAD IN 5 SHAPES**

|         | Diagram   | Notation/TAB (in G)   |
|---------|---|---|
| SHAPE 1 |    |    |
| SHAPE 2 |    |    |
| SHAPE 3 |   |   |
| SHAPE 4 |  |  |
| SHAPE 5 |  |  |

NOTE 1: After shape 5, you can go further up the neck by starting again with the shapes at number 1.

NOTE 2: These shapes would be the same in any key. They would also appear in the same order, but the lowest one on the neck may not be number one. E.g. in C, the lowest position shape would be number 4, with the root note (C) being at the third fret of the A string.

