

Keys By Degrees

Connecting Your Ears to Your Fingers

Scale Degree: Explanation

Major and minor scales contain 7 different pitches. Each one is assigned a number. The first note of the scale is "1", the next is "2", and so on. These numbers are called *scale degrees*.

Key of C Major

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 (1)

Scale Degrees

Remember that although major and minor scales sound different, the same rules apply: the first note is '1', the next is '2' etc.

Instructions for Keys by Degrees Exercises

On the following pages you will see exercises that look like this:

To play these exercises, choose a key. . .

Key of G Major

. . . and (in your mind) combine it with the pattern.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 1

4 5 6 7

1 2 3 2 1 7 1

At first, pick a familiar 'home' key to play the exercise or tune. As soon as you can look away, do so. Then try the pattern in another key. Do as much by ear as possible. Avoid writing anything out unless you've tried *for several minutes* to get it by listening/thinking.

Keys By Degrees

Play these patterns in all keys you know
and use them to learn new keys.

1 (scalar: no skips or leaps) **2**

*use the 7 that sits *just below* the tonic.

Exercises with skips and leaps are more challenging, but go after them!

3 (scalar) **4**

5 **6** (Tonic Triad)

7 (scalar) **8**

Re-invent rhythms once the original pattern is under control.

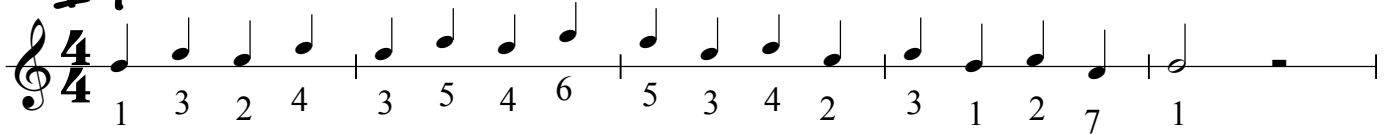
9 (scalar)

10 (Tonic Triad) (Dominant 7) (Tonic) **11**

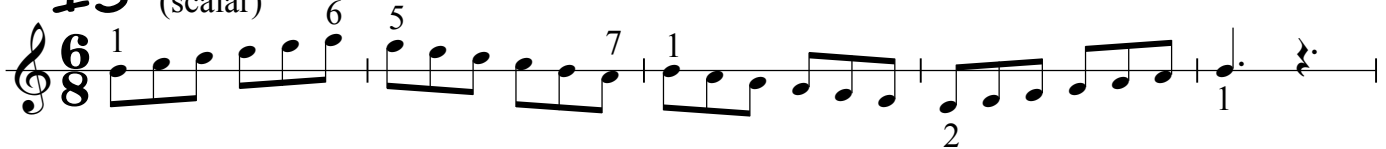
12 (scalar) **13** (Sequence starting on 1, 2, 3)

Make a habit of playing 50/50 major and minor. When playing in minor keys, get used to raising the 7th scale degree a half step *most of the time*, but also play without alteration.

14 Partial scale in 3rds

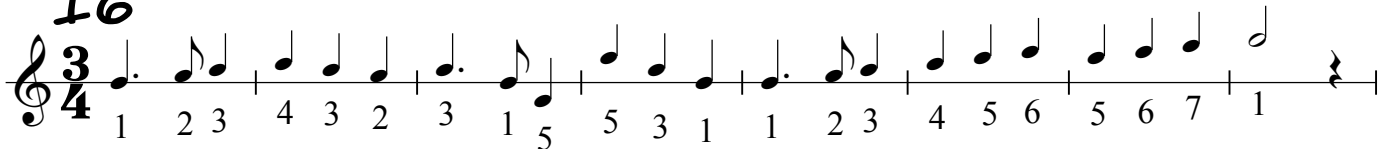


15 (scalar)

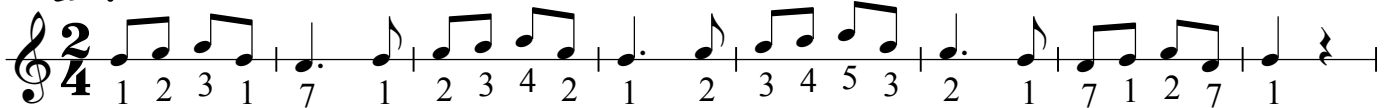


Our aural memory and muscle memory are very slow to imprint. Try to play each pattern 5-10 times *in a row* with no mistakes before moving to a new key or new pattern. Patience!

16



17 (Sequence)



Singing and Ear Training

Being able to sing what you see helps you to play what you hear.

Many intermediate instrumentalists do not like to sing, but it really helps train the ear. At some point, all musicians are asked to play something by ear, (or just *want to*), so the more you "sight sing" the better you will be at figuring out (or even writing-out) tunes by ear without having to fish around on your instrument. Your ear will just know!

To Get Started with Sight Singing:

Day One: play one of these exercises, then sing it back, (or hum or whistle).

Day Two: sing the same exercise first, *then* play it. (Give yourself the starting pitch from your instrument.) The scalar exercises will be the easiest ones at first.

As You Advance: try to imagine the sound of *all* written music before playing it.