

Bradley Laird's

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MandoUniversity News

DIVING HEADFIRST INTO VIDEO INSTRUCTION

Hello, fellow mandolians! Back a few months ago I began toying with the idea of producing a DVD companion to my book *Mandolin Master Class*. I thought it could be a helpful addition to provide demonstrations of the concepts put forth in the book. That project is still alive, though it is growing into a monster (as do many of my projects) and it is still a good distance from the finish line. But, that project and my experimentation into video production and editing has led to some new and exciting things.

I was contacted by a publisher of instrument instructional materials and have begun filming online, downloadable mandolin lessons. At present I have completed seven 5 minute videos on a variety of subjects primarily oriented towards beginning players. In the coming months I will be writing, shooting and editing a series of 20 minute lessons that will span the gamut of student ability levels. The lessons include the video download, PDF files with all the written material for the lesson, and in some cases mp3 tracks for practicing the music.

Getting used to seeing myself (ouch!) on video and trying to get that “deer in the headlights” look off my face is a challenge and you can witness my gradual improvement as the videos accumulate. When filming at their studio I work from a teleprompter. I am reading my own written scripts that I composed, but it is hard to rattle it off “conversationally.” I have newfound respect for talking heads on the news reports on TV. I am getting better, little by little, but it’s all a bit strange I must admit.

Another challenge has been to accurately play the material with that camera rolling! Sometimes it seems like the more I think about “getting it right” the worse I do! Normally, when performing, I do not think much about precisely playing this note or that. I just sorta run on autopilot. When I practice, I labor over nailing every little thing. But, when it comes time to perform, I just try to let it roll from the subconscious. I am learning how hard that can be to do when I am trying to play exactly the music on the page for the camera.

Right now, there are links to the videos on my YouTube channel and I invite you to go have a look. I especially am interested in your comments and suggestions. The primary purpose of all of this effort is to help you learn to play better and **who better to tell me what you want, what works, and what doesn’t, than you?** I have compiled a list of around 30 topics from the upcoming 20 minute videos but I really want to hear from you about the topics and questions you’d like answered.

<http://www.youtube.com/bradleylaird>

ROTATIONAL FORCES IN THE CHOP

If you read the last newsletter I rambled on about the mechanics and physics of chopping. And I stand by my basic premise that gravity plays a large role. And good taste if you can figure out how to

use that! But, in watching these videos I recently filmed I realized that I made no mention at all about a factor in rhythm chopping that also plays a large and important role. At least for me.

The semi-circular rotation of the wrist as the downstroke occurs was not mentioned at all, but does play an important role. Much like a golfer's swing, a simultaneous rotation of the wrist during the fall of the forearm multiplies the speed of the pick. Study a diagram of the bones (or just poke around on your own arm) of the forearm and you will discover two bones run from elbow to wrist-- the *ulna* and the *radius*. Hold your right hand out in front of you like you are about to turn a key in a door lock and you will be able to feel the criss-cross rotation of these two bones as you turn your hand in a circular motion.

On the upstroke the bones are rotated clockwise and are "unwound" counterclockwise during the downstroke. The combination of these two motions, that is the falling of the forearm by its own weight and the rotation of the hand, results in more acceleration of the pick than by simply allowing the pick to fall.

FOUR CLOSED POSITION MAJOR SCALES

Playing the old "do re mi" scale has obvious implications in the world of music. Why is that humble little major scale one of the first things taught to gradeschoolers? Just like how the letters of the alphabet are the most basic building blocks of grand poetry and great novels, our simple major scale is the foundation of much of Western musical thought.

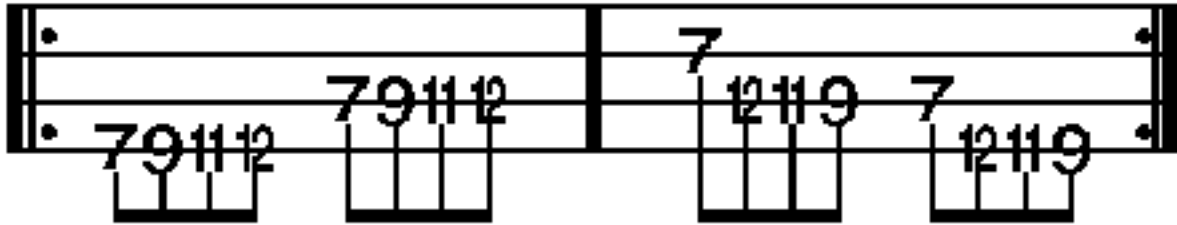
Some folks say that learning to play scales is boring and perhaps, for them, this is so. So is repeating the alphabet over and over in kindergarten. But, you simply cannot skip over from eating Elmer's paste to writing sonnets. Not if you expect to write a decent sonnet anyway. To advance, musically (and in all endeavors), one must work in stages and becoming proficient at major scales is one of the most basic stages.

My book, **Mandolin Master Class**, does an admirable job of explaining what a major scale is and many of the ways in which they are used (to build melodies, to define chord notes, to number chord progressions, etc.) so I will not repeat that here in this freebie newsletter. If you have an understanding of major scales I salute you! If not, I encourage you to answer the call of enlightenment and raise yourself from ignorance at once. Remember, ignorance is not the same as stupidity. Ignorance is simply the condition of not knowing. You can correct that and -- viola! -- you are no longer ingorant! For outright stupidity, on the other hand, I have no cure which I can offer. Perhaps consider a career in politics.

At numerous times I have espoused the virtues of being capable of taking bits and pieces of music and moving them to new locations on the fingerboard. (Transposing.) Transposition is a **force multiplier!** Know one thing (X) and multiply it by the ability to transpose and now you know X times 12 -- or more!

If you need some basic training in major scales I suggest you enlist in **Mandolin Training Camp** where Sergeant Laird will yell in your face until you can hack it. Then try these four exercises:

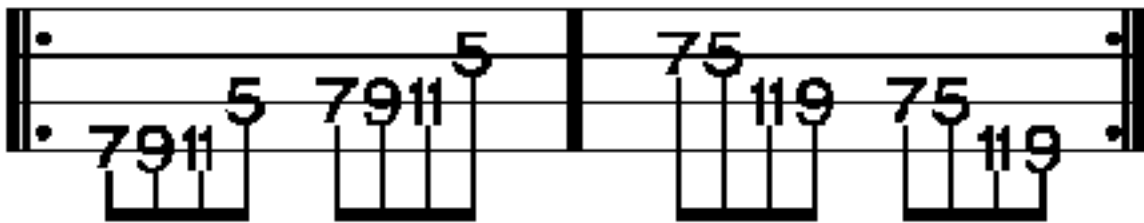
INDEX-ROOT MAJOR SCALE



Start that scale, using your index finger on the 7th fret. Take is slow and really try to nail those 12th fret notes nice and clean. This scale, as do the 3 that follow, go from note 1 (the root) up and octave and then climb one note to the second octave 2nd note before returning. This makes a nice musical and very repeatable 16 note exercise.

MIDDLE-ROOT MAJOR SCALE

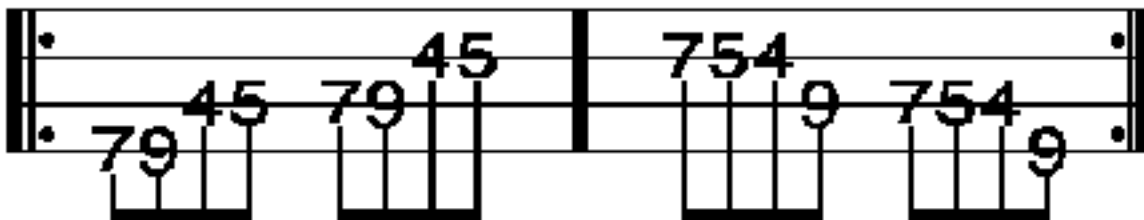
This exercise results in EXACTLY the same notes as the previous version. This time start with your middle finger on the 7th fret. None of these exercise involve any position shifting. Where you start is where you end. Just stick your middle finger on the 7th, the ring hits the 9th, the pinkie hits the 11th, and the index hits the 5th.



An interesting thing worth noting is that **the first 4 notes of a major scale always** use the exact same fingering as the second 4 notes of the major scale. The second group of 4 notes is simply moved one string higher. So, you really only must learn one four note pattern and move it over.

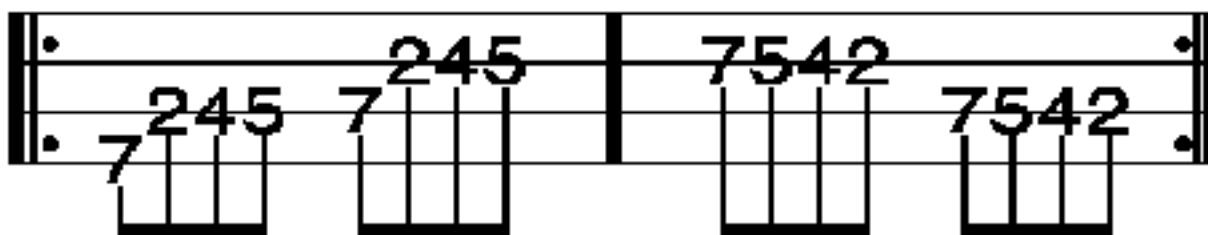
RING-ROOT MAJOR SCALE

This major scale, same notes again, starts using the ring finger on the 7th fret. Play it ring, pinkie, index, middle--twice.



PINKIE-ROOT MAJOR SCALE

Here, finally, we have the pinkie finger starting things off on the 7th fret.



COLD HARD CASH - A BLUEGRASS TUNE

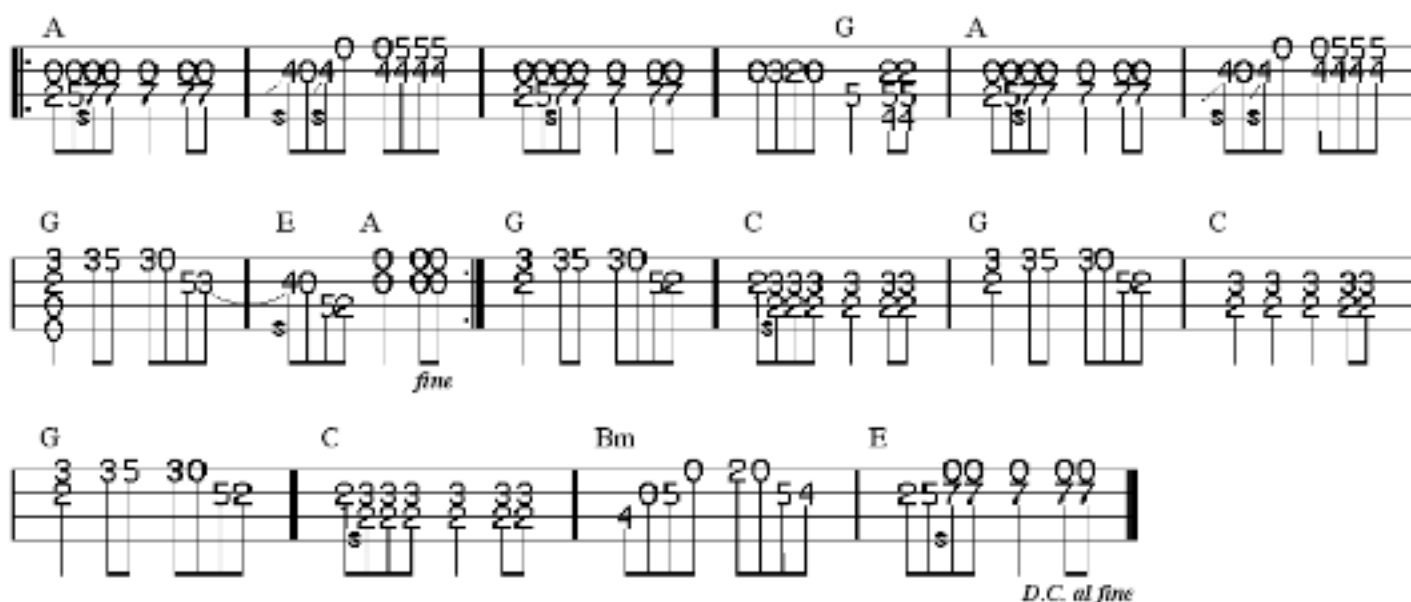
Here's a little tune "I writ" not too long ago. When you get tired of all that scale work try pickin' this little ditty. It's a very Monroe-like A part then it has the unusual feature of dropping from the key of A to the key of G for the B part. You hang there for a while and then there is a iim-V7-I modulation that happily brings you back to the key of A. My suggestion is that you get your guitar playing fool to play it with no capo. It makes the chords much easier on the guitar. All they have to worry about is that one Bm chord. By the way, this title is the ultimate in oxymoronisms as it will obviously never generate a single red cent in monetary returns. That is unless YOU get famous and stick in on YOUR million selling bluegrass album. By the way, there are lyrics to this little tune. Now where did I put that napkin? D.C. al fine means go to the beginning and play until you get to "fine". In other words, play it A-A-B-A then hand it to the next picker.

COLD HARD CASH

Played A A B A

Mandolin Tab

By Bradley Laird



There is a little mp3 file of this tune on my website so download it if you need help.