LEARNING PIANO

Written By Pete Sears

Notation by Bill Wentz

Illustrations by Pete Sears & Tony Williams

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“Pete Sears brings an incredible knowledge of roots music to the table. Whether he is channeling Otis Span or creating his own genre, there is no finer keyboard player. The news is even better. Pete, unlike some artists, knows what he is doing and is a fine teacher. You can dance through the last fifty some years of roots keyboard sounds and Mr. Sears will show you every step!”
*- **Jorma Kaukonen** (Jefferson Airplane, Hot Tuna, JKT, Fur Peace Ranch Guitar Camp)*

“I like the way Pete keeps a bluesy mood going on the DVD while sharing his musical and professional insights.”
*- **Mark Naftalin** (Musician & Radio Host, Paul Butterfield Blues Band, Michael Bloomfield, Percy Mayfield, John Lee Hooker, www.bluespower.com)*

“I just got my first piano, at long last. This DVD is the perfect, fun, intuitive way to dive in. I’m having fun with it.”
*- **Bobby Weir** (Grateful Dead, Ratdog)*

“Pete Sears is one of the most creative and innovative players in Rock ‘n Roll of my generation. He has wonderful intuition, finding just the right part for a song both melodically and rhythmically. Pete is always in the groove.”
***- Chuck Leavell** (The Rolling Stones, The Allman Brothers, Eric Clapton)*

Pete Sears at Hyde Street Studios, San Francisco, CA 2005
Photo by Patrick McCormick

Learning Piano Wth Pete Sears

Note: In the DVD lessons there are mentions of user access to online print materials. The aforementioned materials are all contained within these publications, however you can access additional online materials with the activation code printed on your DVD. Visit www.IconsOfRock.com to access additional features such as; online tuners, metronomes, play along tracks, additional lessons, tips and more.

Pete Sears Biography

Pete Sears with the original Jefferson Starship, 1977

Photo credit © Courtesy Roger Ressmeyer

Since 1964, when Pete Sears began his career as a professional musician, he has played keyboards or bass guitar with a large variety of artists on many records. His credits include the classic early **Rod Stewart** albums, ***Gasoline Alley, Every Picture Tells a Story, Never a Dull Moment,*** and ***Smiler,*** featuring **Ron Wood** and **Martin Quittington** on guitars, **Micky Waller** on drums, **Pete** on piano and some bass, and **Ian Mclagan** on organ.

Pete was bassist and keyboardist with **Jefferson Starship** from 1974 to 1978 (which featured **Grace Slick** on vocals, and **Papa John Creach** on violin), and from 1979 to 1987, he was with **Starship**, playing on over ten albums with the two bands. He contributed several songs to each album, including ***Sandalphon,*** the only instrumental tune on their biggest selling record of the 1970's, ***Red Octopus***. Pete collaborated on many songs with **Grace Slick** as lyricist, including ***Hyperdrive*** and ***Play On Love***. In 1978, after Grace left the band for one album, ***Freedom at Point Zero***, he began working with wife and lyricist, **Jeannette Sears**, and over the years they wrote many of Jefferson Starship's songs, including ***Stranger, Awakening, Save Your Love*****,** and ***Winds of Change***. Several of these songs were made into music videos and were put into heavy rotation on **MTV**.

From **1992** to **2001**, Pete played keyboards with **Jorma Kaukonen, Jack Casady, Michael Falzarano** and **Harvey Sorgen** in the Jefferson Airplane off-shoot, ***Hot Tuna***. He also played in the ***Jorma Kaukonen Trio*** with **Jorma** and **Michael**, often touring Italy. Pete also teaches piano at Jorma's **"Fur Peace Ranch Guitar Camp"** in S.E. Ohio, and performed as a solo artist on the ***Live From Fur Peace Station*** radio show.

In 1998, Pete performed at the **'Rock n Roll Hall of Fame Tribute'** to **John Lee Hooker** at Stanford University as one of John's guests, along with **Charlie Musselwhite, Rich Kirch, Johnny Johnson,** and **Elvin Bishop**. Footage, including an interview with Pete, was shot at the show for an acclaimed documentary film about **John Lee's** life titled, ***That's My Story***. Pete also played **keyboards** for **John Lee** in Oroville, California on May 25th 2001, the third to last show before John's death. **John Lee** was also a guest on Pete's album, ***The Long Haul*** along with artists like **Charlie Musselwhite** and **Steve Kimock**. Pete's other release, ***Watchfire***, in 1988, included **Jerry Garcia, Mickey Hart, David Grisman,** and **Mimi Farina**.

Over the years, Pete has worked on many benefits with **Bob Weir** of the ***Grateful Dead*** including an early version of ***Ratdog***, and in 2001 he formed his own band ***Dawn Patrol***.

In 1999, **Pete** and **Jorma Kaukonen** performed with **Phil Lesh** in a ***Phil and Friends*** show along with **Steve Kimock** at the Warfield Theater in San Francisco.

He is currently a full-time member of ***Moonalice***, featuring **Roger** and **Ann McNamee, GE Smith, Barry Sless, Jimmy Sanchez**, and occasionally, **Jack Casady**. He also flies around the country playing one-off gigs with artists like **David Nelson & Friends, Steve Kimock, Harvey Mandel, Nick Gravenitas, Eric McFadden**, and **Rich Kirch**, and is collaborating on an audio/visual project with renowned visual artist, **Andreas Nottebohm**.

Career Overview:

In 1964 and 1965, Pete toured Britain with the ***Sons of Fred***, recording five singles at E.M.I.'s **Abbey Road Studios** in London. Next, after a brief stint on keyboards playing Motown songs with ***Fleur De Lys***, he formed the underground psychedelic band, ***Sam Gopal Dream*** along with renowned guitarist, **Mick Hutchinson,** and Tabla player, **Sam Gopal**. In 1967, **Jimi Hendrix** joined the band onstage for a night of very intense jamming. Pete then recorded keyboards with bluesman **Freddy King's** European backing band, ***Steamhammer***. In 1969, Pete worked as a session musician in London, including playing bass on **Marian Segal's** folk rock ***Jade*** album, with **Terry Cox** from ***Pentangle***. He then flew to the USA to form ***Silver Meter*** with **Leigh Stevens** and **Micky Waller,** and later the original ***Stoneground,*** who toured Europe and the US. Both bands were managed by **Tom Donahue,** pioneer of the FM music radio format.

Fleur de Lys, (Pete 2nd from left) London, 1965

Pete recorded piano and bass on **Rod Stewart's** ***Gasoline Alley*** in 1970. In 1971, he played bass on the first **Papa John Creach** solo album in San Francisco. He also performed with **Jerry Garcia, Bob Weir, John Cipollina,** and **Mario Cipollina** on the first **K.S.A.N.** FM live radio broadcast, presided over by DJ, **Richard Gossett**.

After recording on Rod's ***Every Picture Tells a Story*** in 1971, Pete joined The ***Long John Baldry Blues Band*** for their first tour of the United States. He was later a founding member of the San Francisco based band, ***Copperhead,*** which featured guitarist and close friend, **John Cipollina**. He left the band just before their first album, to fly back to England and record with **Rod Stewart** again, returning to the U.S. immediately to play bass with renowned keyboardist, **Nicky Hopkins**. Pete played piano with bluesman **Nick Gravenites** on the notorious ***Mill Valley Bunch*** album during this period, as well as co-producing and arranging the music for the **Kathi McDonald** album, ***Insane Asylum***. It was during this time that Pete met **Grace Slick** and **Paul Kantner** at Wally Heider Studios in San Francisco. He ended up performing and writing the song, ***Better Lying Down*** with Grace for her solo album, ***"Manhole"***.

He also formed a band, ***Sears, Schon, Errico,*** with **Greg Errico** and **Neal Schon**. Pete did quite a bit of session work as well, including working on the album, ***Betty Davis*** which many consider to be one of the seminal **funk** albums of the time. In 1974, he joined ***Jefferson Starship***, staying with them for thirteen years. In 1975, Pete (on piano) and **Jerry Garcia** played on **Robert Hunter's** album, ***Tiger Rose***. In 1988, **Jerry Garcia** was a guest on Pete's album, ***Watchfire***, along with **David Grisman, Mickey Hart,** and several other friends. The album dealt with environmental and human rights issues, with the lyrics written by writer, **Jeannette Sears**.

Pete joined ***Hot Tuna*** in 1992, staying with them for ten years. He released an avant garde solo piano album, ***Millennium***, in 2000, and introduced the work with an improvisational solo piano concert in **Tokyo**, Japan. Pete released his third solo CD, ***The Long Haul***, in 2001, featuring many guests including **Charlie Musselwhite** and **John Lee Hooker**.

Pete and Jeannette worked in environmental and human rights issues for many years, mostly concentrating their efforts in Central America. Pete has written and recorded the original scores for many documentary films, including the award winning ***Fight in the Fields*** on **Cesar Chavez** and the **Farm Workers Union**.

Artists Pete has played with:

For many years Pete has traveled back and forth between the US and England...touring, recording, and doing session work on over one hundred albums. He has played with many artists, including **John Lee Hooker, Alvin Youngblood Hart, Warren Haynes, Steve Kimock, Ron Wood, Jerry Garcia, Steamhammer, Long John Baldry, Rod Stewart, Silver Metre, Peter Rowan, Los Lobos, Government Mule, Levon Helm, Tracy Nelson, Rich Kirch, Dave Sharp, Zakiya Hooker, G.E. Smith, Taylor Barton, Harvey Mandel, Nick Gravenites, Taj Mahal, Mickey Hart, Hans Olsen, Mark Naftalin, Bob Weir, Nicky Hopkins, Leftover Salmon, Bobby Vega, Don Johnson, Mark Unobsky, Eric McFadden, Wally Ingram, Smokey Smothers, Lester (Mad Dog) Davenport, Mark Benno, John Popper, Amos Garrett, Craig Horton & The Scratchin Dogs, Rusted Root, Norton Buffalo, Zero, Sons of Fred, the original Stoneground, the original Sam Gopals Dream with Mick Hutchinson, Fleur de Lys, British beat poet Mike Hart with fellow poet and Cream lyricist Pete Brown, Leigh Stephens, Jackie McCauley and Judy Dyble, Betty Davis, Copperhead with John Cipollina, Chris Jagger, Roy Harper, Steve Gillete, Robert Hunter** (album produced by Jerry Garcia), **Ike and Tina Turner** (recorded at Bolic Sound for two weeks), **Papa John Creach, Steve Cropper, Neal Schon, Derek Trucks,**

David Lindley, Buddy Cage and Stir Fried, Tim Rose, Brewer & Shipley, Merrell Fankhauser, Maria Muldaur, Alex Harvey, Wavy Gravy, Kim Fowley, Freddy Roulette, Kathi McDonald, Sly Stone, Chet Nichols, The Pointer Sisters, Nils Lofgren, Big Brother, Shana Morrison, Floyd "Red Crow" Westerman, Dennis Banks, Charlie Hill, Mick Gillette, Larry Graham, Wayne Jackson & the Memphis Horns, Mal Sharpe, Terry Haggerty, Zydeco Flames, Julie Larson, Ultra Violet, Mark Karen, David Hayes, Quicksilver Messenger Service, Flying Other Brothers, Freddie Hughes, Henry Kaiser, Billy Kruetzam, Donna Jean Godchaux, and David Nelson.

He has also sat in or jammed with such people as: **Jimi Hendrix, Carlos Santana, Little Feat, The Allman Brothers, Graham Bond, Sam Bush, T-Bone Burnett, Country Joe McDonald, Hubert Sumlin, Zigaboo Modeliste, Sugar Blue, Vasser Clements, Elvis Costello, James Burton, David Crosby, Johnny Johnson, Paul Butterfield, Mike Bloomfield, Boz Scaggs, Merl Saunders, Chris Whitley, Shannon McNally, Frank Marino, Trey Anastasio, Holy Modal Rounders, John Sebastian, Higher Ground, Pinetop Perkins, Ken Kesey, Blues Traveler, Hot Buttered Rum, Tea Leaf Green, Ron Thompson & the Resistors, Grateful Dead, Eric Burdon, Laurie Lewis** and many more.

Pete was featured in **Film and Tape World** and has been interviewed for **Keyboard,** and **Guitar Player** magazines. He was given a ***Bay Area Music Award*** in the **Bassist** category, and was also nominated the same year in the **Keyboard** category, the only musician ever to be nominated in both categories for a ***Bammy*** at the same time.

He was also a recipient of the **Golden Reel Award,** and was nominated for a **Grammy** with the Starship.

In 1988, Pete and Jeannette received awards from the **California Institute of Integral Studies for ongoing humanitarian contributions to the Bay Area community**. Pete has also received awards from the **John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts**, **Very Special Arts for the Handicapped,** and from **Bread and Roses**.

Jefferson Starship played many benefits during the **70s** & early **80s,** including shows for the ***Vietnam Veterans,*** and ***Cambodia,*** at the Moscone Center in San Francisco, during which he jammed with the ***Grateful Dead*** in the finale, and several ***Save the San Francisco Cable Cars*** fund raisers.

Pete and Jeannette organized a **radio drive** on six major San Francisco Bay Area stations to collect food and clothing for war refugees from **Guatemala** and **El Salvador** who were living in the Bay Area.

In 1989, Pete, Jeannette, and director-producer Ray Telles, along with several other prominent Bay Area film people, formed a non-profit video company, ***Watchfire Productions***. Working as a project of ***Earth Island Institute,*** Watchfire produced a music video on human rights abuses in **Guatemala**, a country Pete and Jeannette have visited many times since their first trip there in 1979. Watchfire Productions sent out thousands of free copies of the video to organizations and individuals working for human rights in Central America and around the world. The music video featured Pete on piano and vocals, **David Grisman** on Mandolin, and **Enrique Cruz** on Kena (Andean Flute) and Siqus (Andean Pan Pipes). **Jerry Garcia** and the Rex Foundation, Tides, and several other prominent foundations funded the video.

Pete served on the Board of ***N.A.S.A.F.O.N.A.***, a joint **Hopi Indian** and **University of Arizona** based organization, which worked to restore **ancient garden terracing** on the **Hopi** reservation in Arizona.

He also served on the board of ***The Endangered Peoples Project,*** an organization headed by ethnobotonist and explorer, **Dr. Wade Davis**, author of Serpent and the Rainbow, Penan, One River, Shadows in the Sun, and many other books.

Pete has performed at, organized, and assembled the musicians for numerous benefits, including the 1988 ***Soviet American Peace Walk*** concert in San Francisco, which attracted twenty thousand people and featured **Jerry Garcia, Grace Slick, Paul Kantner, Mickey Hart, John Cipollina,** and many other notable musicians. The benefit was organized by peace activists, Ron Frazier and Bill McCarthy.

Pete also organized and played at a benefit for the ***Native American Inter Tribal Bison Co-op,*** featuring **Bob Weir, Jorma Kaukonen,** and **Chris Whitley**; **Jerry Garcia** was unable to perform due to illness. **Coran Capshaw** donated his club **"Trax"** in Charlottesville, Virginia, for the benefit along with his staff. Pete regularly plays piano for **Wavy Gravy's *SEVA*** benefits, including a 1994 concert in which ***Hot Tuna*** performed with **Bob Weir** and **David Crosby**.

In 2004, he organized and performed at a benefit for **Jefferson Airplane** Drummer, **Spencer Dryden,** featuring **Bob Weir, Warren Haynes, Peter Rowan, David Nelson, Nick Gravenitas, Harvey Mandel, Terry Haggerty, Flying Other Brothers,** and many others. The benefit was made possible thanks to **Dawn Holiday** and the staff at **Slim's** in San Francisco.

In 2005, Pete performed at, and organized the music and artist line-up for ***Chet Fest;*** a benefit celebrating the life of San Francisco's **Chet Helms**. Originally conceived as a benefit to help with Chet's medical bills while he was still alive, the event sadly turned into a memorial concert with the proceeds going directly to pay off his bills and to his family.

The concert, which was held at the **Great American Music Hall** in San Francisco, featured **Bob Weir, Mickey Hart, T-Bone Burnett, Big Brother & the Holding Company, Paul Kantner, David Frieburg, Country Joe McDonald, Leigh Stevens, Roger & Ann McNamee and the Flying Other Brothers, Joli Valenti,** along with many other San Francisco artists who were friends of Chet's. Several major Bay Area poster artists provided original artwork for the event.

Jefferson Starship at 2400 Fulton Street, San Francisco, 1975.
Photo Courtesy of Jim Marshall

“Pete and I had many musical adventures together in the late 60s early 70s with Rod Stewart and the boys. Pete excelled on piano, organ, bass, you name it, he blended it!”
***Ron Wood** (The Rolling Stones, Faces, The Jeff Beck Group, The New Barbarians)*

Pete Sears on Accordion at Chetfest, GAMH, San Francisco. July 29th, 2005.
Photo by Bob Minkin

Pete Sears with the Steve Kimock Band, Fillmore, San Francisco, May 5, 2005.
Photo by Arielle Phares

Learning Piano With Pete Sears

In this book, I am going to attempt to give you a few pointers on how to play the piano keyboard. This book is designed primarily for beginners, although there are parts which may be of interest to more advanced players. It's a step by step approach, which will hopefully allow you to move along at your own pace, and achieve a level of proficiency where your playing takes on a life of its own. Like anything else, the most useful approach to learning the piano keyboard is to study each exercise thoroughly before moving on to the next section. This will take patience and practice. The more you practice, the more chords, related scales and music theory you'll be able to use to express your musical ideas with, which is especially important in the world of improvisation.

Of course you can skip around the book as much as you like. I may occasionally repeat information along the way to help reinforce concepts that I feel are important for your overall knowledge of the keyboard. I also enlisted the help of a couple of friends to record some grooves for you to play along with later, available at www.iconsofrock.com. You can loop these grooves to go as long as you like, or until your neighbors begin banging on the ceiling.

If you have any interest at all in playing music for a living, you'll need a good dose of tenacity, the willingness to work very hard and a lot of luck. It'll also help to be an eternal optimist, and maybe slightly insane. But maybe "making a living in music" wasn't what you had in mind when you bought this book. Let's just have some fun—only you can decide what to do with your newfound virtuosity.

POSTURE:

The first thing you'll need to work on is how to sit correctly at the keyboard. Posture is very important, especially if you're playing for extended periods of time. How you hold your body can affect, and at the same time be a product of, your attitude towards the tune you're performing. Attitude is important...it can give your music that little extra something.

Basically, I have horrible posture, all hunched over and Scrooge-like... and I probably shouldn't recommend it. But my hunched over Dickinsonian posture seems to help me draw on a melancholy moody feel, or perhaps a dig in and "don't mess with me" feel, depending on the style of music, especially when I'm playing in front of an audience (at least it unconsciously feels that way to me). Of course, it probably looks completely ridiculous and uncomfortable to everyone else, but it makes me feel good. I personally wouldn't feel right sitting up straight and grinning at the audience every few seconds...but if that feels right for you...go for it. However, to avoid back aches, especially when practicing, I advise sitting in the classic piano playing posture. Keep your back straight and your feet resting firmly on the floor. Your forearms and hands should be parallel to the ground with your hands slightly arched and relaxed.

You'll need a decent chair of the correct height to sit on, the classic piano bench, which doesn't have a back, is approximately 19" high by 30" wide. It's best if you can use an adjustable bench or chair to fine-tune your comfort level. I often use a drum stool on the road because they're adjustable and easy to carry to gigs, but for home, a bench or chair works best.

Piano & Bench

If you are using an electric keyboard, make sure the stand is adjusted so the surface of the keyboard is as close as possible to the height of a regular piano, about 179”.

With an electric keyboard you may want to use a headset instead of an amplifier and speakers, especially in the early stages of your training, when you’re hacking and clanking away at the notes trying to get something to work. In case you don’t want to use an amplifier while you practice, most electric keyboards have a headphone input as an option; whatever feels right for you, and your surroundings.

You can take the headset off and plug in to an amp, or use the built-in speakers when you have something impressive worked out and want to show off to your family and friends. You’ll be able to proudly display the results of the irritating key clicking noise that’s been wafting relentlessly through the house for hours. If you happen to be using a real piano, then be sure to warn fellow lodgers in advance so they can escape the scene gracefully. Everyone in the house will, of course, be extremely happy about your intention to become a world renowned pianist, and very proud of your tenacity and resolve in practicing your scales. But they may want to go to the park or the movies anyway, just so they don’t distract from your genius.

Another point about digital keyboards: try to stay away from the transpose button, as this can inspire bad habits. Not that I’m any great example. I admit I’ve occasionally used the transpose button when thrown into the deep end at a live show, especially with a capo wielding guitarist I’ve never played with before. I’d sometimes transpose the piano key to the chord shapes he was playing, so I could read his fingers like a chord chart. If the guitarist has a capo on the sixth fret, and plays the standard folk G chord shape, he is actually playing a Db...and if there are many frequent changes, things can get confusing very fast. However, I told myself I would try to stay away from the cheating button, and listen to the chordal relationships of the tune, which are the same, regardless of the key you are playing in. You will, hopefully, understand this concept more after working with this book. It’s also very important you practice the following exercises and chord sequences in a variety of keys, including Bb, a key commonly used when horn players are present. Each key will have it’s own mood and feel.

You can delve into the complexities of the keyboard as far as you want to; the satisfaction is in the journey.

FIRST EXERCISE:

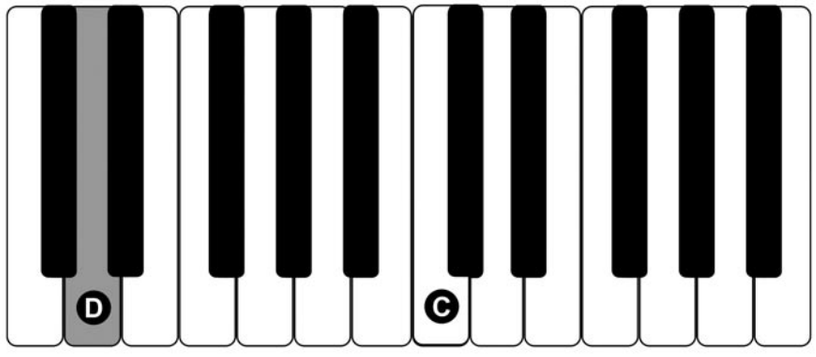
I'm going to begin by showing you something that's easy, fun and hopefully inspiring to play.

Music teachers may cringe at this exercise, but I doubt many music teachers bought this book, and I suspect you bought it to primarily have fun.

We'll begin digging a little deeper into the more technical mysteries of the keyboard in a few minutes.

I'm going to show you how to do this exercise now, but you can, of course, play around with it anytime the mood takes you. Either way, the reason it hopefully sounds good to you will make more sense later in the DVD and this book.

Place the little finger of your left hand over the D note below middle C like this.

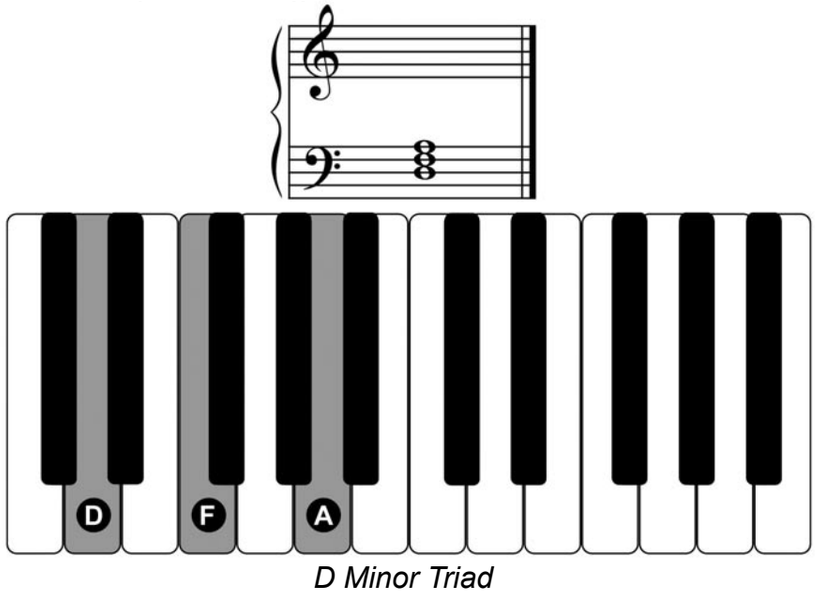


Middle C

Now actually play the D note with your little finger, also known in piano music fingering as the 5th finger.

Now play it again but this time add the F note with your 3rd finger.

Now add the A note with your 2nd finger.



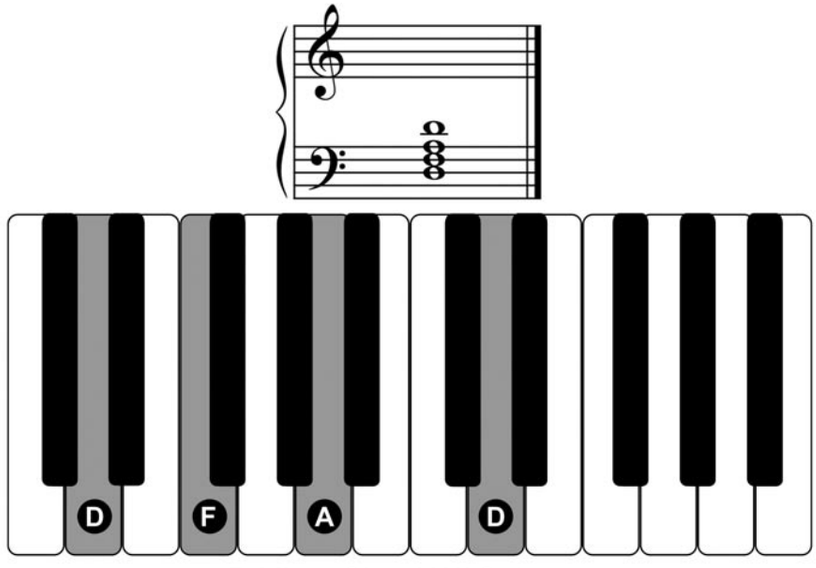
D Minor Triad

Play all three notes together at the same time, and you have a triad, the minimum notes required to make a chord. You're also playing the moody, and happy sad chord of D minor.

You can also play the Sustain pedal during this exercise if you like, but don't get into the habit of using it all the time, and if you do use it, lift your right foot off the pedal every few notes. That way it doesn't turn into a ringing, noisy mess; unless that sounds good to you, of course.

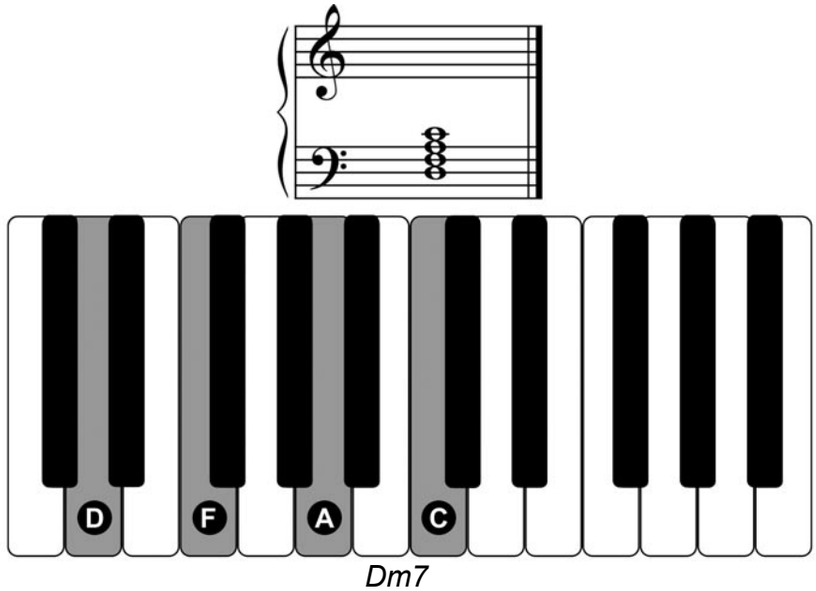
Practice playing this simple D minor chord with your left hand for a minute or two. Let the tones sound out, and listen to the beautiful mood they create.

Now add the thumb, also called the 1st finger of your left hand and play the octave D, eight notes up in the scale from the low D you are playing with your little finger. The extra note makes a richer sounding D minor chord.



D Minor Chord W/ Octave

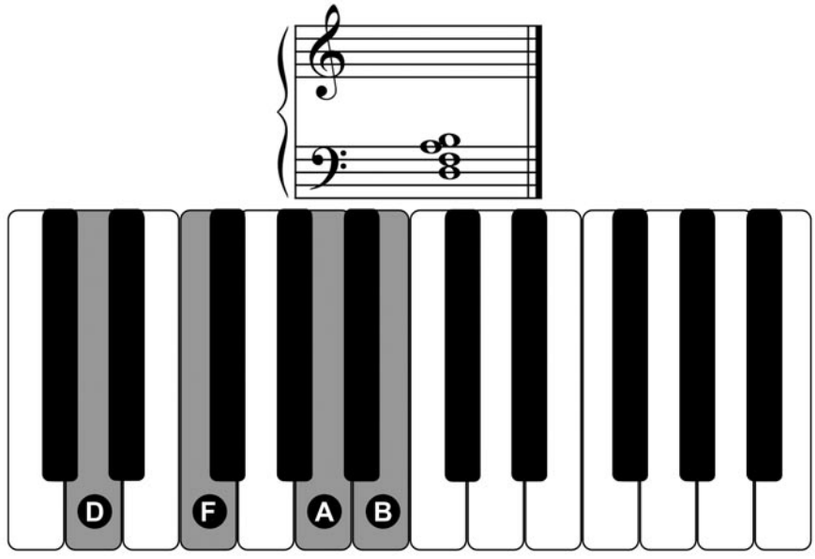
Now move your thumb down a whole step to the next white note, which happens to be a C, and play it with the other notes, this makes a D minor 7th chord.



Dm7

You can make any seventh chord, in any key you happen to be in, simply by counting up seven notes in the scale.

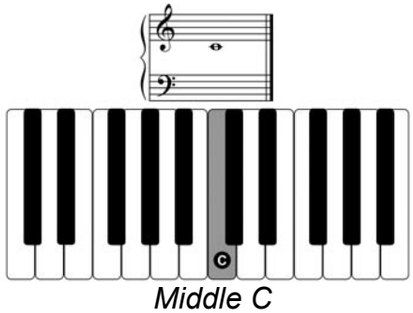
If you're feeling adventurous you can move your thumb down to the next white note which is a B. This creates a **D minor 6th chord**.



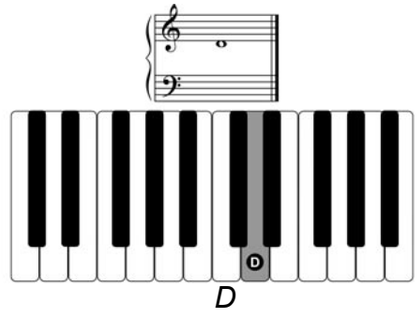
Dm6

Notice the subtly different moods of each chord. Moving your thumb around just creates different and interesting sounding D minor chords. This sort of chordal experimentation is one of the keys to improvisational playing.

Now place your right thumb (or 1st finger of the right hand) over any D note further up the keyboard. You can always find D by locating C which is the white note just below and to the left of the two black notes, and then moving up to the next white note. This is D.

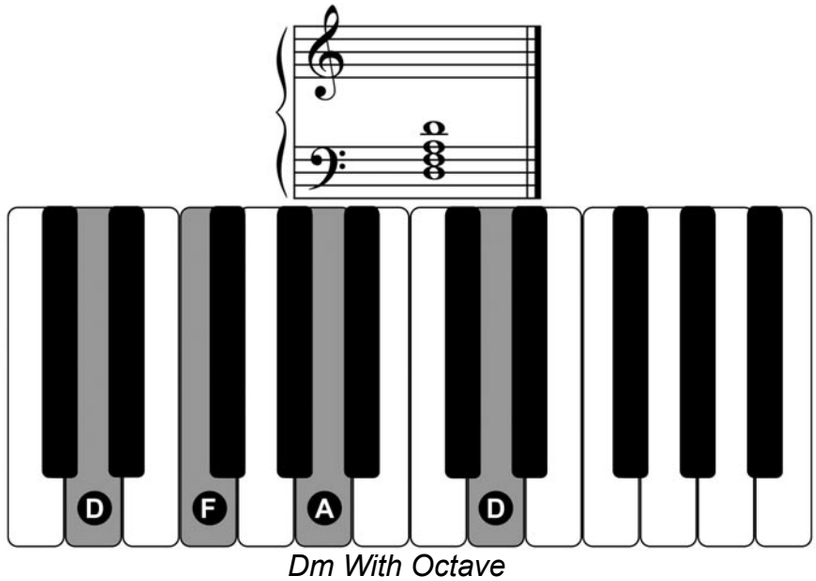


Middle C



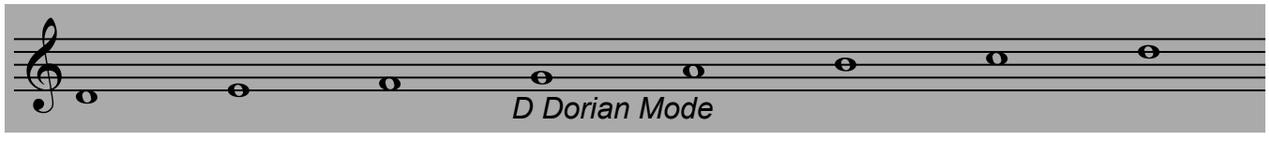
D

I'll show you how the notes go in a bit. You'll see that the note patterns repeat themselves over and over again for the entire keyboard. So, play the D minor chord once and hold it down, let it rest and listen to the melancholy, beautiful tones of your (hopefully tuned) piano. Now, while the tones of your D minor chord are still sounding, play a higher D with your right hand thumb followed by any series of white notes that take your fancy in any order.

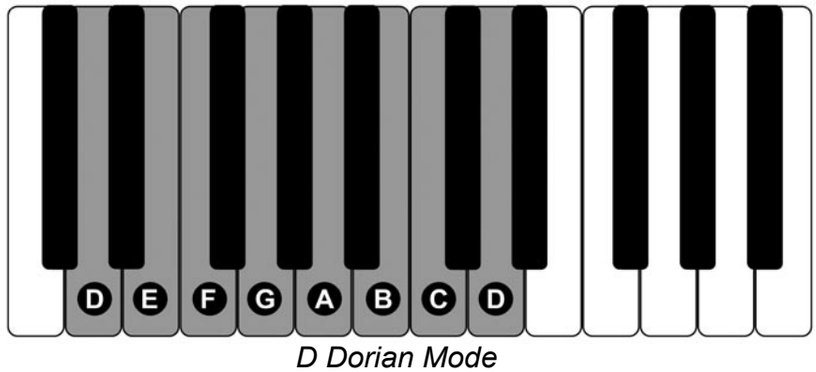


Dm With Octave

Have fun and experiment with it—make up some licks. It just so happens that the white notes you are playing are all in the D minor Dorian Mode scale.

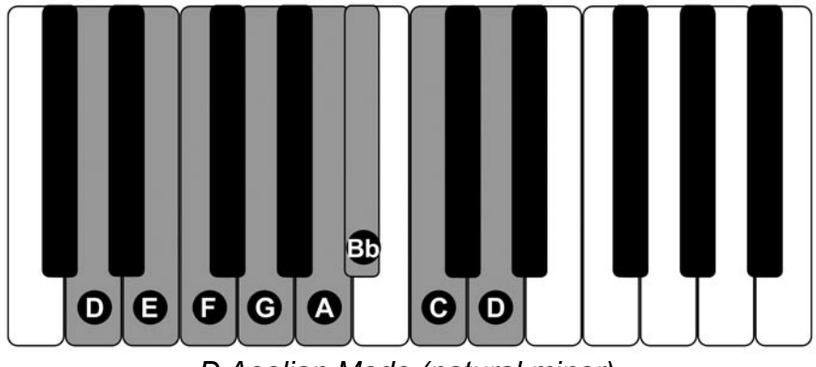


D Dorian Mode



D Dorian Mode

After you've played around soloing in the Dorian Mode for a while, try playing the scale with a B flat instead of a B. You find Bb by dropping the B down a half step to the black note immediately below it, which is a Bb. This slight change puts you in what's called the Aeolian Mode, a natural minor scale.



D Aeolian Mode (natural minor)

All the different scales we are going to work on create their own unique mood. There is nothing wrong with either approach; the Aeolian and the Dorian are both popular modes to solo in. Neither is correct or incorrect. The music will just have a different feel and take you and the listener to another space. Try experimenting with it. Remember, rules are just a starting point, make the music your own.

Enough fun for now, let's get down to work.

Phil Lesh & Friends, Warfield, San Francisco. June 4th, 1999.
Photo by Bob Minkin

"Pete Sears is a wonderful player and a grand soul who always adds spirit and color to everything that he graces. His heart always points in the right direction: helping others who are less fortunate, for example, or adding some rollicking piano to a stellar jam. Enjoy this video—you won't fail to learn from it."
***Phil Lesh** (Grateful Dead, Phil Lesh & Friends)*

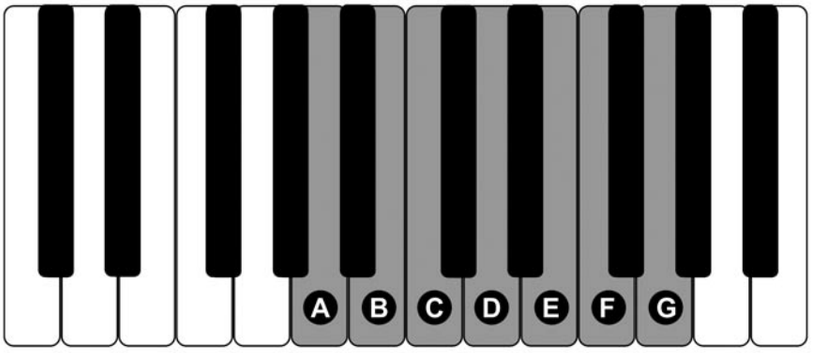
Pete's always been my favorite piano player for the blues or any other style of music. He really puts his heart into what he does. John Lee Hooker would tell me, "Pete sure knows how to boogie on those 88's."
Rich Kirch *(John Lee Hooker, Jimmy Rogers, Charlie Musselwhite, Jimmy Dawkins, Luther Tucker)*


Pete Sears & David Nelson.
Photo by Paul Farrier


John Lee Hooker, Pete Sears, Rick Kirch. May 25, 2001, Oroville, CA

Lesson 1

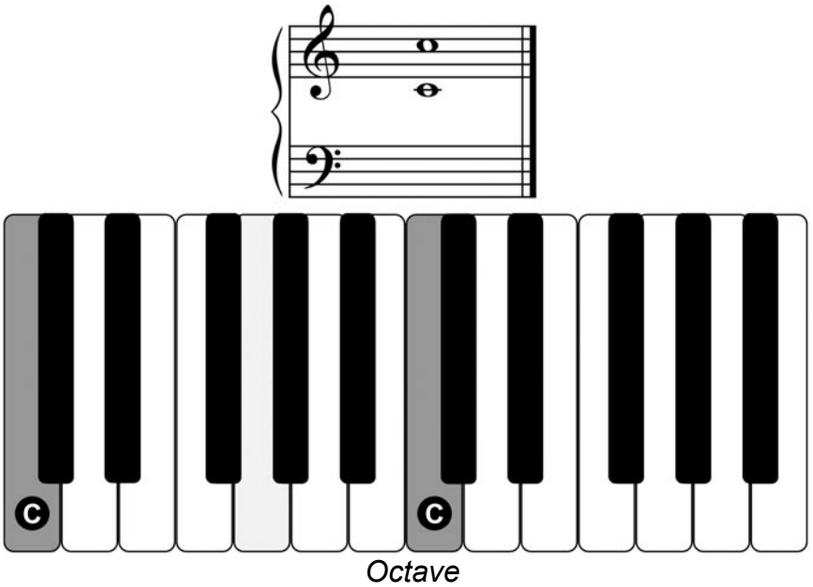
Each key of a piano keyboard represents a specific musical note. They are each named by using certain letters of the alphabet **A B C D E F G.**



If you look carefully you'll see that there is a pattern of white notes relative to black notes that repeats itself over and over again for all 88 keys of the keyboard.

If you concentrate on learning the names and relationships of the notes of one octave, from the root note of the key you are in, also referred to as the tonic, to the same note an octave higher, it will open up the entire keyboard to you.

One octave is 8 steps from bottom to the top regardless of which key you are in. In a minute I'll show you the key of C major and you can play its 8 notes, or twelve half steps if you also include all the black notes.



Octave

Most western music is based on the twelve half steps between the root of the scale, and the note of the same name an octave higher. These notes are, starting on middle C.

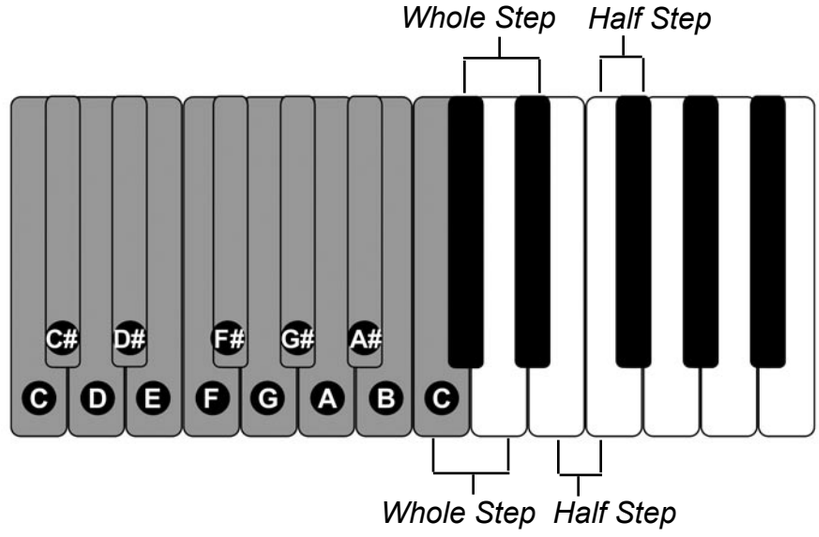
C C# D D# E F F# G G# A A# B

Any one of these twelve notes has their own scales consisting of 8 notes or steps.

•Two keys side by side (black or white) are called a Half Step.

•Two keys separated by another key are referred to as a Whole Step.

• Two Half steps equal one Whole Step.



When you play all the half steps in succession it is called a chromatic scale.

Steps are really just the intervals, or distance between the notes. If you play the very next note up or down it's called a Half step, also known as a semi-tone. Skip a note up or down, and it's called a Whole step (or a Tone).

The relationships between the steps in the various keys help you work out the kind of scale or chord you want to play, major, minor, diminished etc.

We'll get to structuring chords a bit later.

You'll find sharps & flats on the keyboard when you drop down a half step to a black note from an adjacent white note, or go sharp a half step by playing the black note directly above it. For example: (follow this example on your piano or the piano note diagram)

Find the white D note and drop down a half step to the black Db note next to and below it. Or try going up a half step to the black D# note.

Of course if you started on F# and went up a HALF STEP you would play the white colored G note. If you went up a WHOLE STEP from F# you'd play G#. Down a WHOLE STEP from F# would give you E.

If you began on F# and went down a HALF STEP you would play F. If you play C and play the next note up, which in this case happens to be a black note, you have stepped up a half step (or a semi-tone) to C#. If you start on C and skip the next note up to D, you have traveled a Whole step (or a Tone).

Play the next note down from C and you've traveled a half step (or semi-tone) down to B which happens to be a white note. If you start on C and skip the next note down you have traveled a Whole step (or a Tone) to Bb, which happens to be a black note. This applies to all the notes. Try starting on the F note and moving a half step up to F#.

Then try playing F and moving down a half step to E, or a whole step to Eb. Let's try G, move up a half step to G# or a whole step to A, or down from G a half step to Gb (which can also be an F#) or a whole step to F.

This may all seem a little confusing; and it is.

Bob Weir, Cesar Rosas, Mickey Hart, Pete Sears. Further Festival Jam, 1996.
Photo by Robbi Cohn

"Pete's personality shines through in his playing, as does his versatility and sense of musical history."

Warren Haynes *(Government Mule, The Allman Brothers, Phil Lesh & Friends)*

SCALES

We should begin by learning some scales and practicing them over and over. I know this sounds incredibly boring, but it will be crucial to developing your technique and ease of playing. Learning the scales and understanding how they relate to tunes and melody is the key to understanding the entire keyboard, how to make things sound interesting, and how to play well.

The notes in a scale are played one after another in a specific, ascending or descending order. Most are eight notes long and the top and bottom notes have the same name.

Scale types have specific names and are built on the ROOT NOTE or bottom note of the scale. The root note, which is the same note the scale begins on, could start on any of the twelve notes available. All chordal and tonal relationships I'm going to show you will apply to any key you want to play a tune in.

Other than all keys having their own unique mood, you'll often need to transpose a song from one key to another to make it more comfortable for a singer's vocal range. Perhaps the original key is too high, or low for their own voice.

The scale is created by a pattern of two kinds of steps: HALF STEPS & WHOLE STEPS.

As I mentioned before, some white keys are side by side and some are broken up by a black key. The step pattern interval between two keys directly adjacent to each other, white or black is called a HALF STEP.

Two keys separated by another key are referred to as a WHOLE STEP.

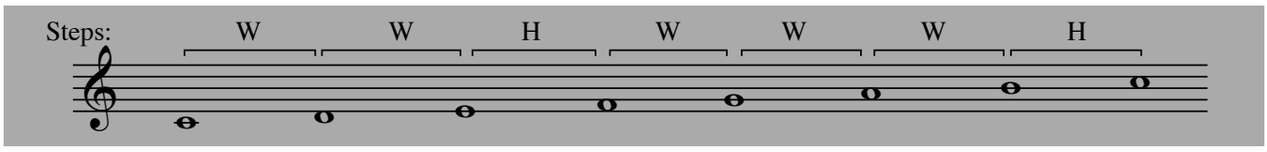
Two HALF STEPS equal one WHOLE STEP.

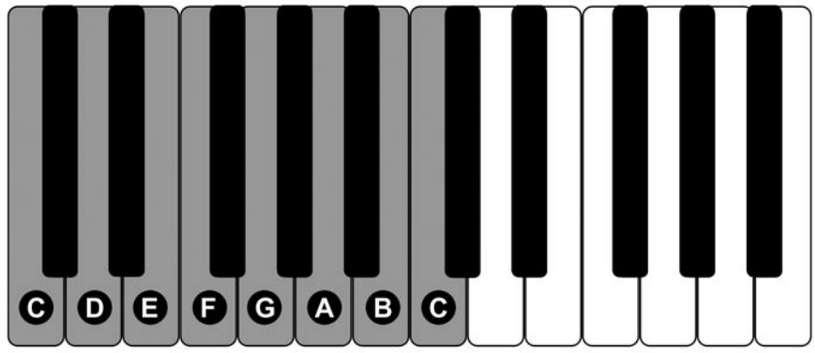
So the step pattern relationships for any major Ionian scale are:

WHOLE step-WHOLE step-HALF step-WHOLE step-WHOLE step-WHOLE step-HALF step.

When you learn one scale, like say the C major scale, you will be able to, by applying the same Step Pattern note relationships, work out a major scale in any of the twelve keys.

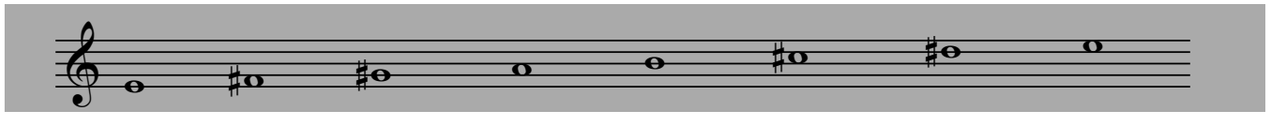
In C: C to D (whole step) D to E (whole step) E to F (half step) F to G (whole step) G to A (whole step) A to B (whole step) B to C (half step).

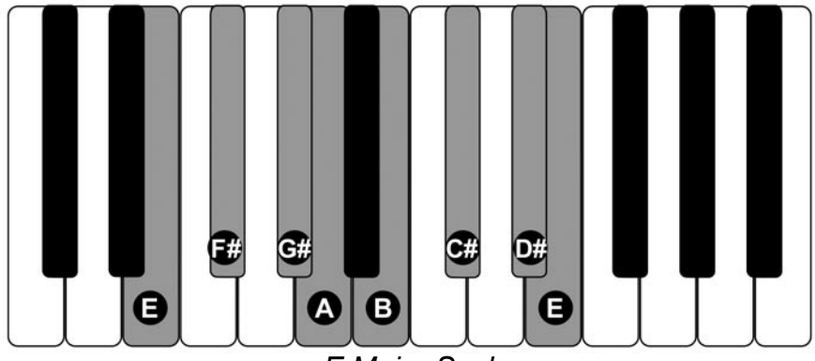




C Major Scale

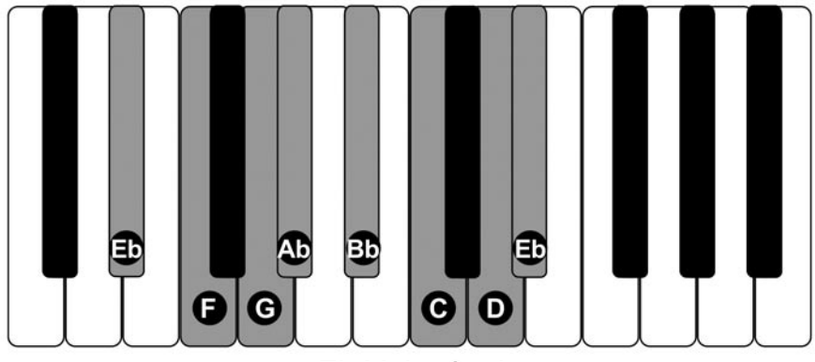
Again, no matter which of the twelve keys you are working in, it has no bearing whether the piano notes happen to be white or black, what is important is the step pattern relationship between the notes of the scale. If you play the C scale using the step pattern interval relationships for a major scale, it just happens that all 8 notes in the scale are white. If you play the **E major scale**, using the same step pattern intervals for a major scale, you end up playing 4 white notes and 4 black notes.





E Major Scale

In all cases the first and eighth notes of a regular major scale are the same, in this case E, and then E an octave higher. Or G, or C etc. The **E flat (Eb) major scale** starts on Eb, which happens to be a black note. But the step pattern intervals for the major scale are the same.

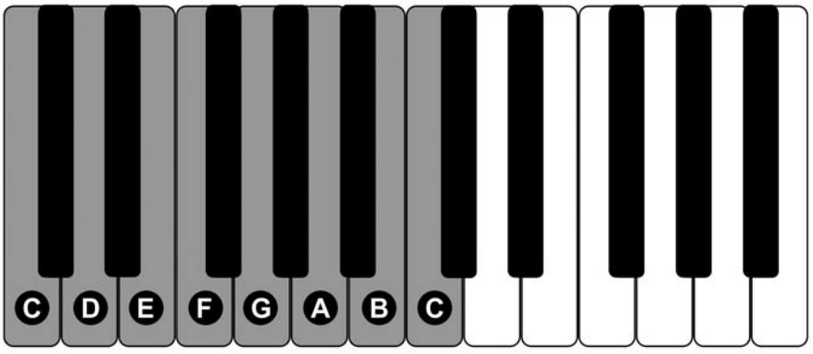


Eb Major Scale

Let’s start with the note that is considered to be in the middle of the keyboard and is easy to identify for beginners, the white key appropriately named MIDDLE C—sometimes called C4 because it’s the fourth C up from the bottom. As I mentioned before, it’s the one just below and to the left of the two black keys.

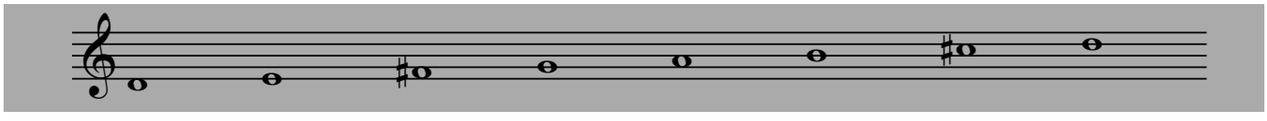
Starting with Middle C, the notes of the C major scale are named like this:

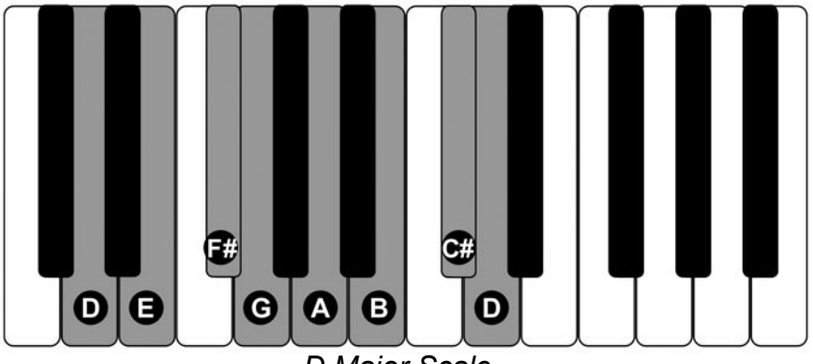
C D E F G A B ending up on the C note again. We are in the key of C Major.



C Major Scale

All eight notes in the C major Ionian scale happen to be white ones. But if I move up a Whole step to D and play the D major scale, keeping the major scale Step Pattern relationship from note to note, you’ll see we end up playing two black notes, F#, and C#. We are now playing in the key of D.



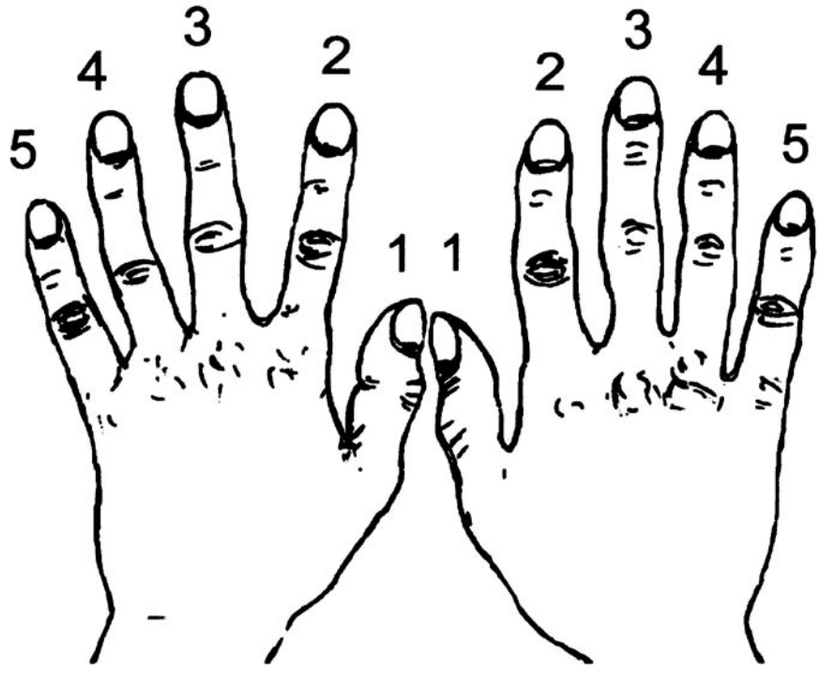


D Major Scale

The major scale step pattern, which again, applies to all keys is: WHOLE step (D to E) WHOLE step (E to F#) HALF step (F# to G) WHOLE step (G to A) WHOLE step (A to B) WHOLE step (B to C#) HALF step (C# to D again, but an octave higher).

Let's find Middle C again so we can work on the correct fingering for the C major scale. If you look at the white keys only, you'll see that when you count up eight notes from C, using the major scale step pattern, it ends on C again. As I said before, that's one octave, eight notes.

Here is a chart showing the way fingers are numbered.

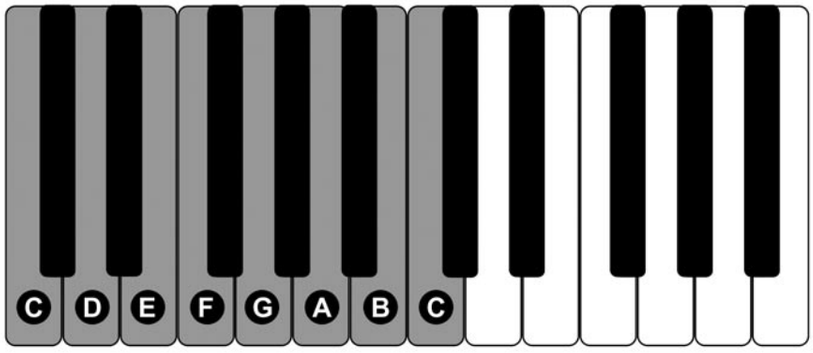


You may notice that the fingering is different than on guitar charts. This is because of the added thumb, which is referred to in piano music as the first finger.

Which fingers you use to play the different notes of a scale or improvised solo, is extremely important to improving your technique and ease of playing. Try to assign the correct finger to a note in advance...you'll have to think about it at first, but it will eventually become second nature.

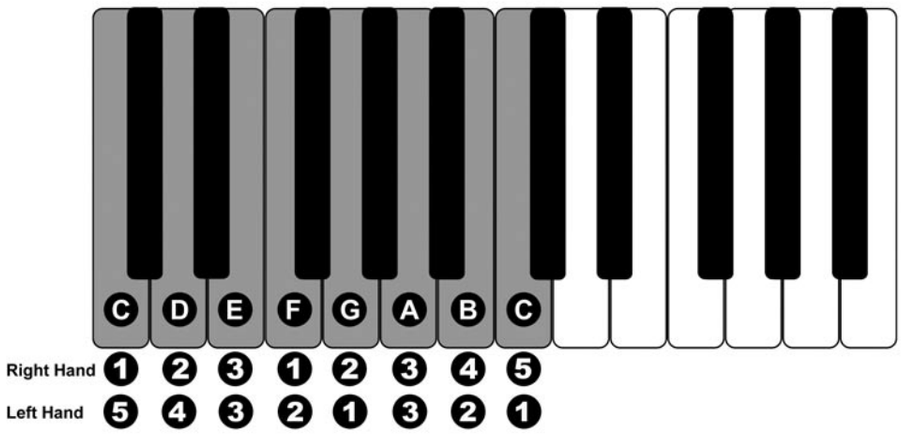
Now let's try playing the C Ionian major scale, concentrating on the correct fingering. Once again, the notes are:

C D E F G A B ending up on the C note again



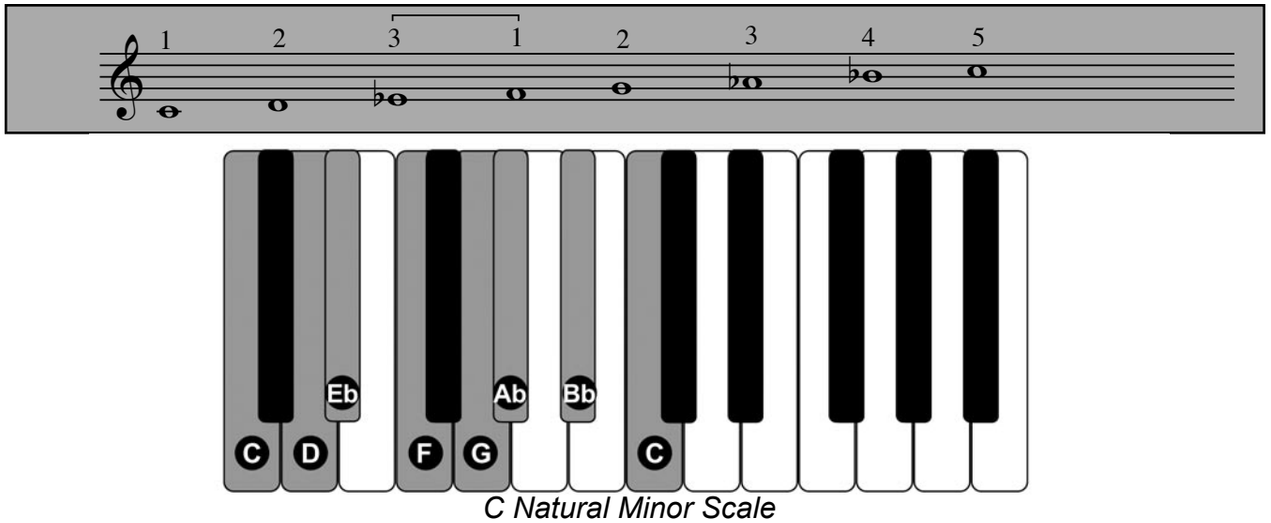
C Major Scale

So let's play all eight notes of the C Major scale one after the other beginning with the thumb on the root note of the C scale, middle C. Then use your 2nd and 3rd fingers to play the next two notes, D and E. Because there are eight notes in the scale, and I assume you only have five fingers, you will have to bring your thumb under to play the next note which is F. This way you don't run out of fingers before you reach the top of the scale. Now use your 2nd finger to play G, and on up the scale with the 3rd and 4th fingers playing A and B, ending on C an octave higher with the 5th finger. Now start back down. You will run out of fingers for notes again so you'll have to bring over your 3rd finger to play the E, leaving just two notes and two fingers left to finish the descending scale, D and C. That's the Ionian scale of C major.



The left hand fingering is a little different.

Natural Minor Scale: (Also known as the Aeolian Mode)



C Natural Minor Scale

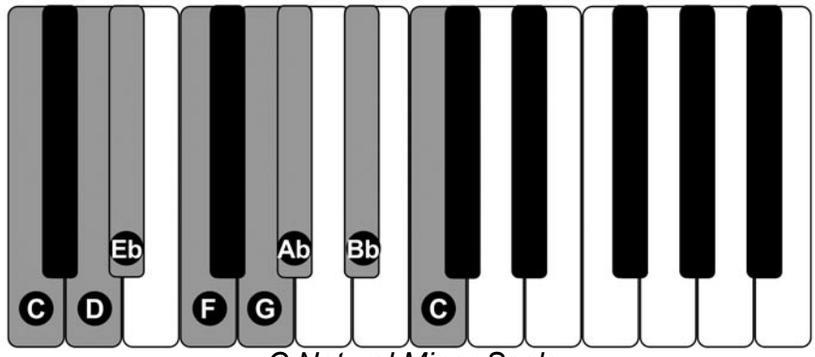
Minor scales and minor chords tend to give the music a melancholy, pensive quality, as opposed to major scales which tend to evoke brighter, happier feelings.

Learning the different minor scales can be a challenge, but considering all the soloing possibilities they open up, definitely worth it.

Minor scales flat the third note of the scale with a step pattern of:

Whole step-Half step-Whole step-Whole step-Half step-Whole step-Whole step.

For the scale of C minor, we will begin again with the thumb on middle C, and start up the scale again. C to D is a Whole step.



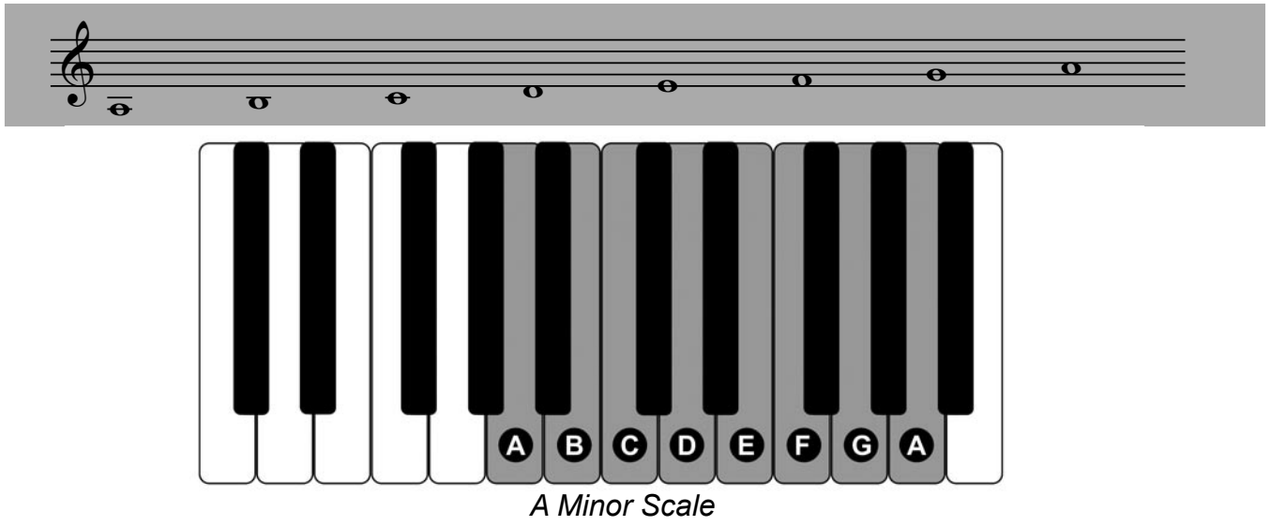
C Natural Minor Scale

But this time when we get to the third note in the scale, instead of playing the regular E note, we will flat the note by dropping down a half tone to E flat, which in the C scale happens to be a black note.

Remember we are now following the step pattern for a minor scale.

The notes for the C minor scale are: **C, D, Eb, F, G, Ab, Bb, C**

Notice the moodier feel to the scale. Minor scales can use Flats & Sharps; depending on what key you are in. If you play the A minor natural scale by playing the minor scale step pattern, you happen to end up using only white notes in the scale.



A Minor Scale

A to B (Whole step) B to C (Half step) C to D (Whole step) D to E (Whole step) E to F (Half step) F to G (Whole step) G to A (Whole step)

The natural minor scale is defined by the flattened third, which makes it a minor, a perfect fifth which makes it stable, and a flat seventh. The flat seventh means the scale doesn't have a strong dominant note leading back into the root like a major scale or the harmonic minor. But who cares, it's a beautiful sounding scale anyway. Remember, the step pattern intervals for minor scales are the same in all keys. If you play the natural G minor scale you end up having to play Bb & Eb. Both black notes. If you play the E minor scale you have to play F#.

I suggest you practice the different scales as often as possible, being careful to use the correct fingering and step pattern relationships. You should also try these exercises with your left hand. Same scales but starting down the keyboard one or two octaves. Eventually paralleling an octave or two apart and playing the scales with both hands at the same time.

Harmonic Minor Scale:

Now let's try a Harmonic minor scale. The Harmonic minor scale has only one note that is different from a regular minor scale. But this altered note creates a very different sounding scale. Just start playing a C minor scale again, and when you get to the seventh note, sharp it, or raise it a Half Step to B. This rule of course applies to all twelve keys.

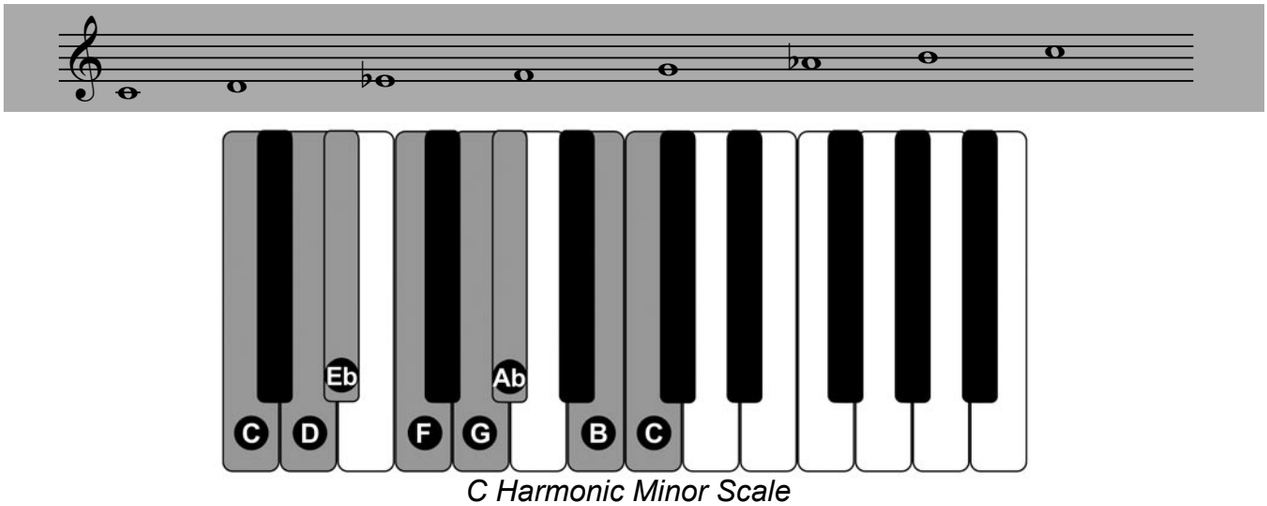
Here's the chromatic scale reference. Any of these notes could be the root of it's own scale.

C C# D D# E F F# G G# A A# B

We are mostly using C as a reference to practice with. The Harmonic minor step pattern for any key is:

Whole step, Half step, Whole step, Whole step, Half step, Whole step + a Half step, Half step.

So the notes for the C minor harmonic scale are: **C, D, Eb, F, G, Ab, B, C**



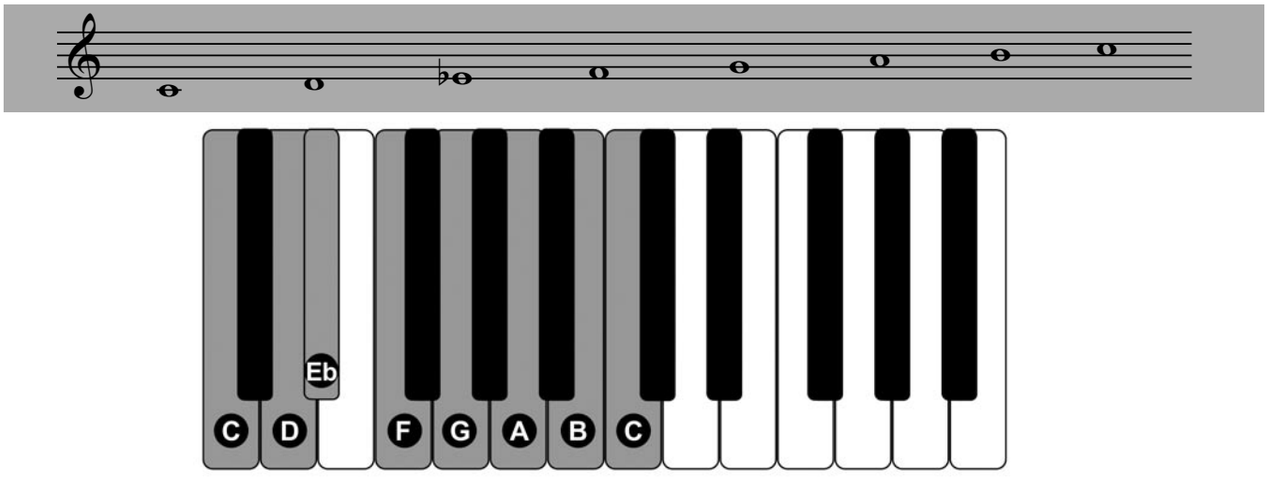
C Harmonic Minor Scale

The harmonic scale is used a lot in classical piano music. Another variation on the minor scale, often used in jazz, is The **Melodic minor**.

Here is the Melodic minor step pattern:

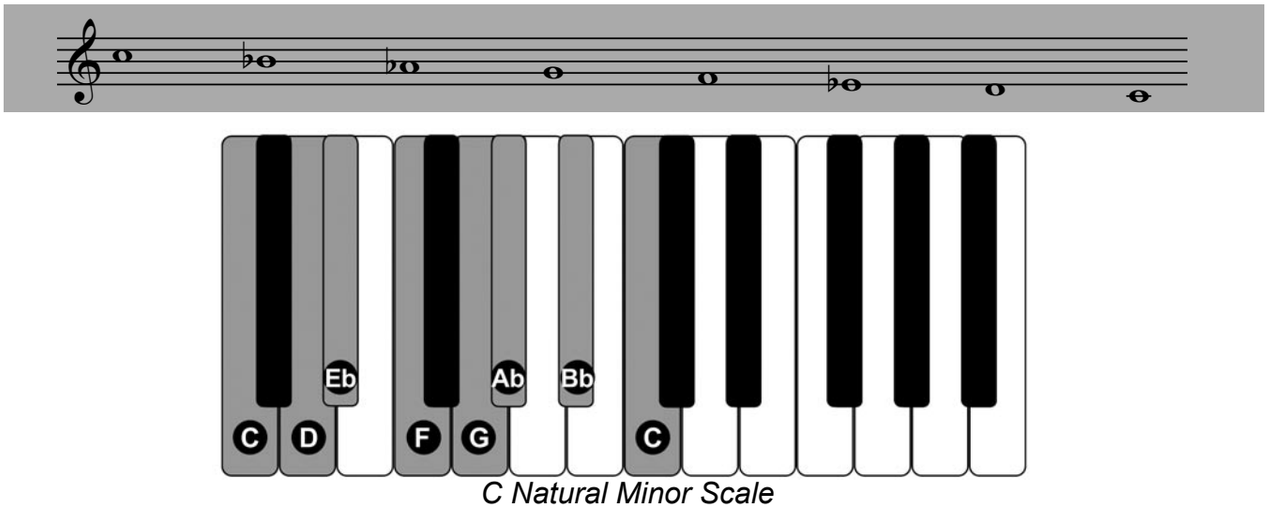
Whole step, Half step, Whole step, Whole step, Whole step, Whole step, Half step

The Melodic C minor scale is: **C, D, Eb, F, G, A, B, C**



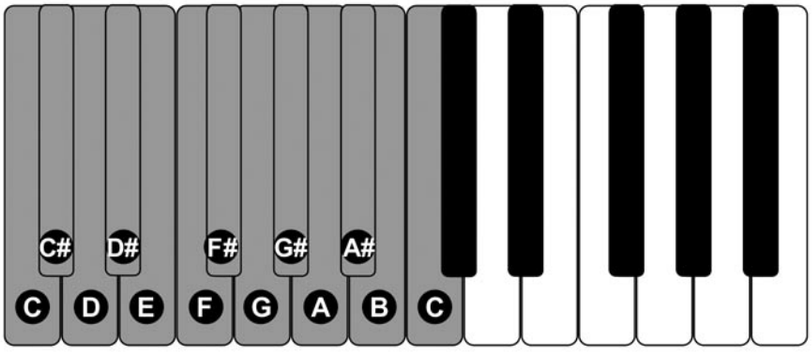
C Melodic Minor Scale

However when descending, try switching to a natural minor scale.



C Natural Minor Scale

Try working these scales out in other keys. Here's the chromatic scale again for reference.



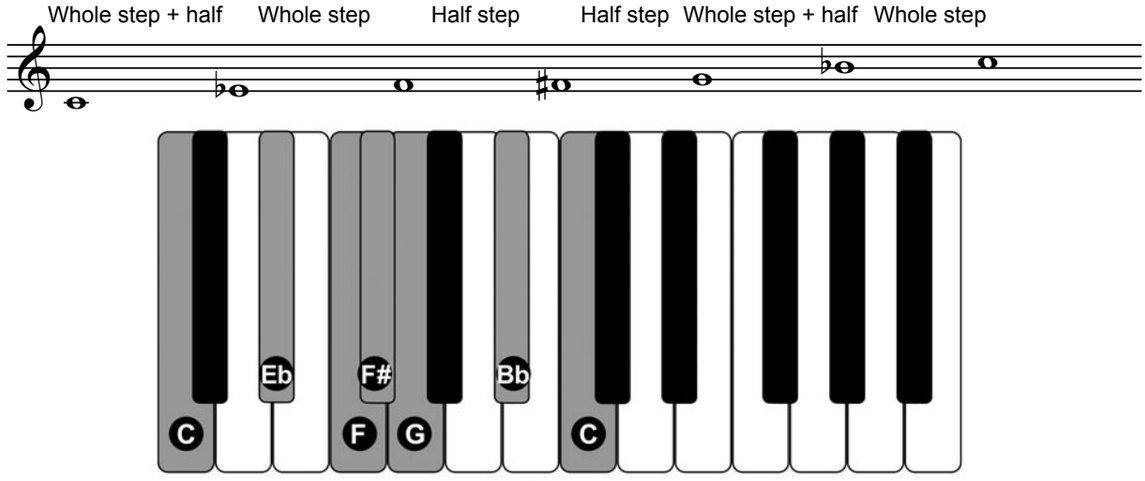
The Blues Scale:

Now let's try the blues scale. The blues scale is very versatile, you can hear it in Rock, Country, Jazz, and of course, the Blues. The step pattern for the Blues scale is:

Whole step + half, Whole step, Half step, Half step, Whole step + half, then a Whole step

So the **Blues scale in C** would be: C, Eb, F, F#, G, Bb, C

Here's a chart showing the scale written down, as well as, the step patterns which shows the distance between notes. These step pattern relationships of course apply to the blues scale in any key.



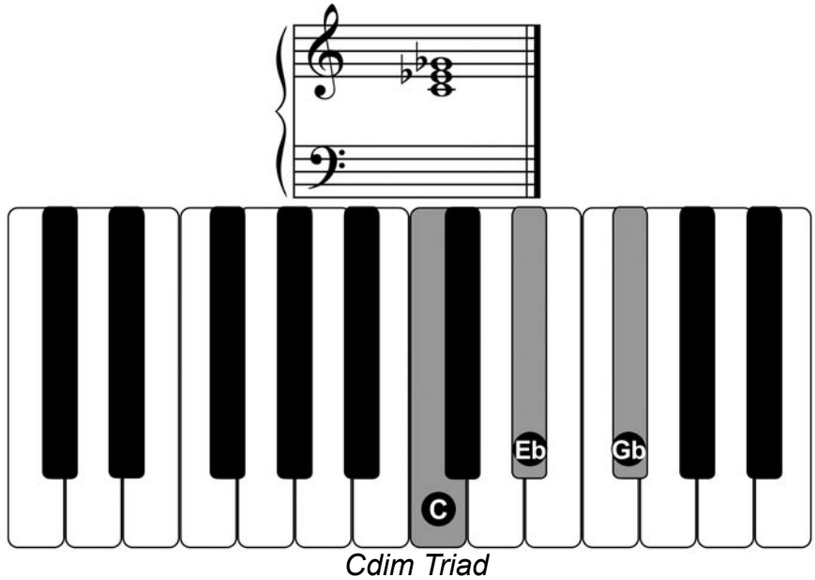
C Blues Scale

Play the C with your 1st finger (the thumb). Eb with the 2nd, F the 3rd, F# with your 4th, roll your 1st finger, the thumb under to play the G and the Bb with your 2nd . If you want to continue the run up the keyboard past the octave of C, bring your thumb under to play the C and carry on up with the same fingering. To go back down play the Bb with your 2nd finger, the G with the thumb and I bring over the 2nd finger for the F#, the thumb the F, 2nd finger the Eb and the thumb on C. I've no idea if this fingering is correct, but it's the way I do it.

For now, we're just learning some right hand scales to improvise with. We'll get to some blues chord changes later in the book.

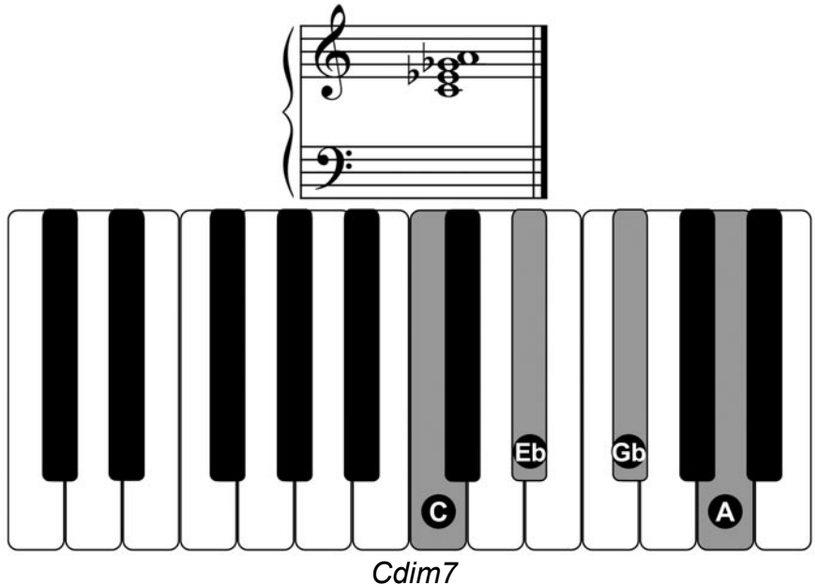
The Diminished scale:

This will sounds quite a bit different than anything we've worked on so far. The C diminished chord looks like this. The basic triad (three notes) diminished chord is: **C, Eb, Gb**. It's often used in a slow blues.



Cdim Triad

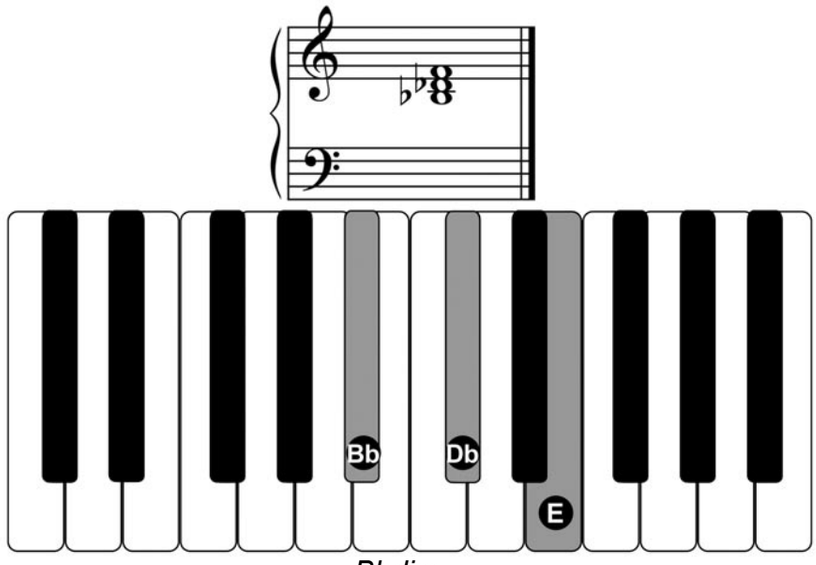
For a C diminished seven, add an A on top, **C, Eb, Gb, A**



Cdim7

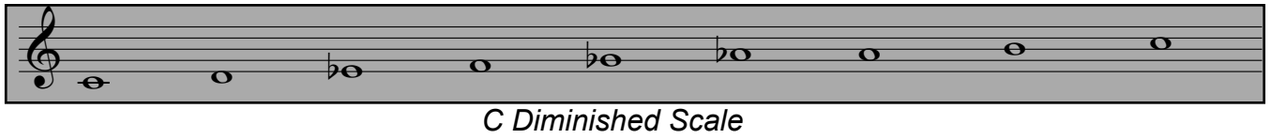
You can find the diminished chord in any key by playing the root note, a minor third interval, and a diminished fifth, which is a perfect fifth lowered one half step. So if you were in Bb major you would count up the scale and flat the third note (D to Db) and flat the fifth (F a half step to E).

The notes of Bb diminished would be: **Bb, Db, E**



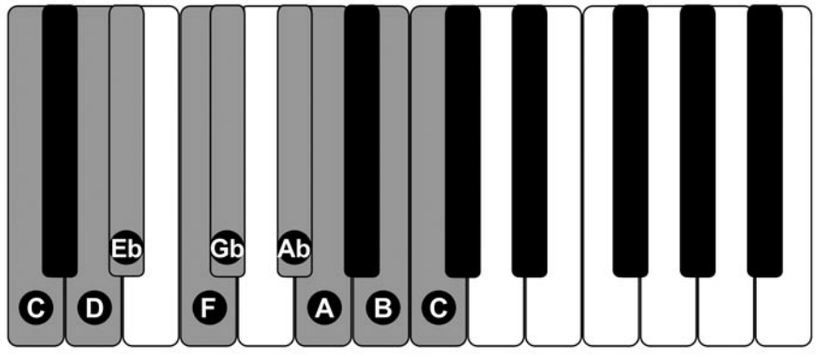
Bbdim

The Notes for a C diminished scale are: **C, D, Eb, F, Gb, Ab, A, B, C**



C Diminished Scale

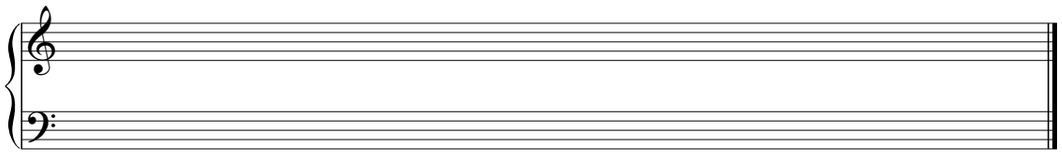
(Whole) (Half) (Whole) (Half) (Whole) (Half) (Whole) (Half)



Play the C diminished chord with your left hand, and play the C diminished scale with your right. When you get the time, try working the diminished scale out in other keys.

CHORDS

Let's begin learning some chords to play with your left hand, or right hand, but for now we'll just use the left hand to accompany your right hand scales. You'll see the notes of the chord written down in the bass clef, the lower set of two 5 musical staff lines used in written music.



The written bass clef is generally played by the left hand, but the keyboard diagram of course applies just the same when played by either hand in any octave.

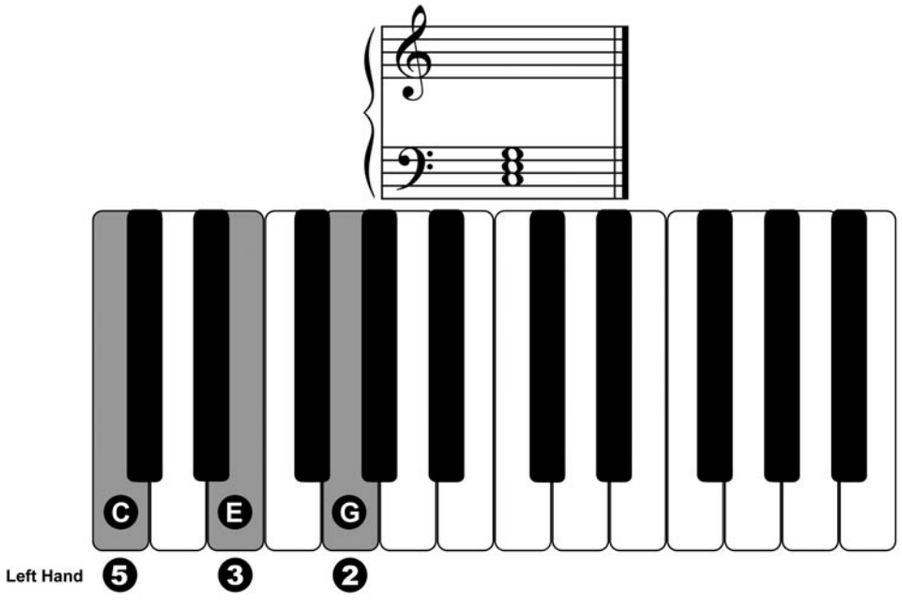
An Interval is basically the vertical distance between two or more notes, which is easier to visualize when seen written down as musical notation. When these notes are played together at the same time it creates a harmony. The mood and sound that is created depends on the selection of notes used to make up the chord. So the intervals of the chord can be called, Harmonic Intervals. If you play these notes one after the other in sequence you are creating a melody rather than a chord, although the two can sometimes run together. Playing intervals in a sequence of varying note lengths can be called Melodic Intervals.

So you work out the notes of a basic triad chord by playing the first, third and fifth notes, or intervals of any scale.

Let's begin by working on the C major chord. When you're feeling adventurous, you can and should try applying everything you learn to all twelve keys. Use the relative Step Pattern intervals for different types of chords and scales. There's no hurry. Just take your time and try to approach it all with a sense of exploration.

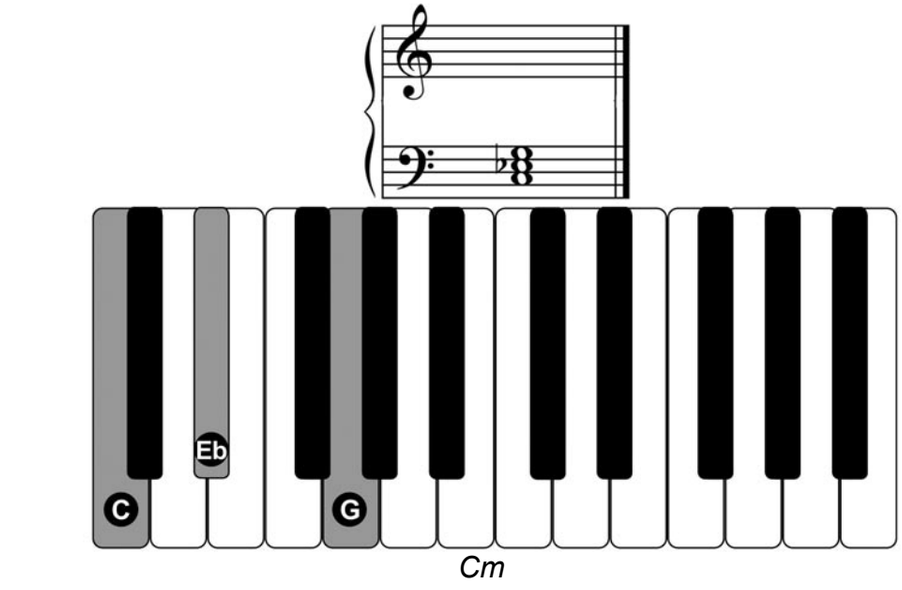
Play the root note C with the little finger, also called the fifth finger of your left hand, then play the third note up in the scale, E with your third finger, then the fifth note with your 2nd finger. Play these notes together at the same time and you create a nice sounding chord, C major.

Again, we are going to use the left hand to sound these chords, so we can simultaneously work on scales with our right.



CMaj

Remember you can flat the third note of any major scale in any key to create the minor version of the chord. To make a C major into a C minor chord you would flat the third note of the C major scale from an E to an Eb.



Cm

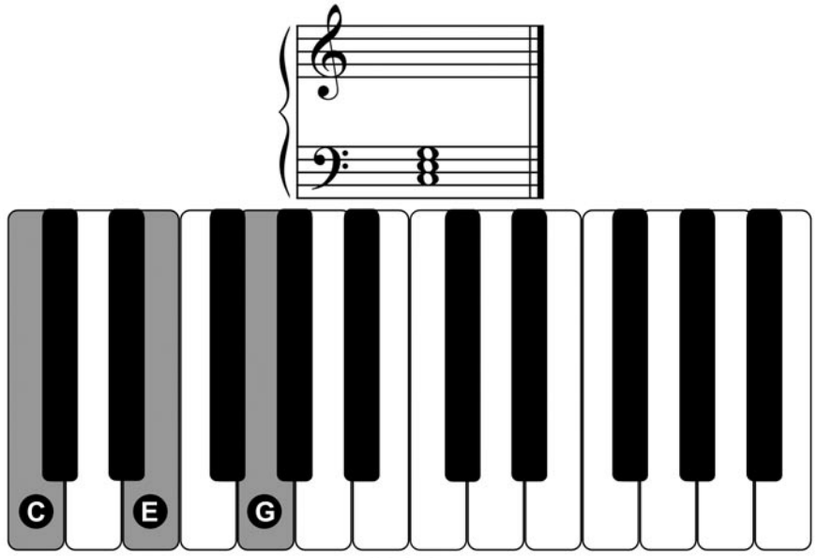
Remember to match the chord you play with the appropriate scale, minor, major etc.

I'm starting things off by showing you most things in the key of C, but as I've mentioned before, the step pattern relationships will apply to all 12 keys. Try to work chords and scales out in other keys whenever you get a chance.

A satisfying way to practice is to play a chord with your left hand, hold it down, listen to the sound and mood it creates and play the appropriate scales with your right hand.

You can later add an extra note on top of the basic triad chords by using your left hand thumb to play notes that color the chord.

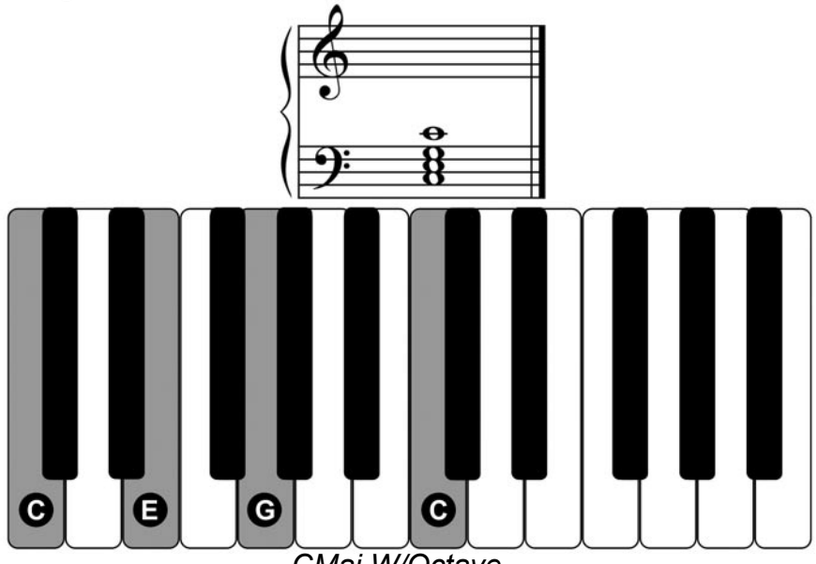
Let’s try it in C Major again.



CMaj

Fifth finger of left hand on C, third finger on E and your second finger on G

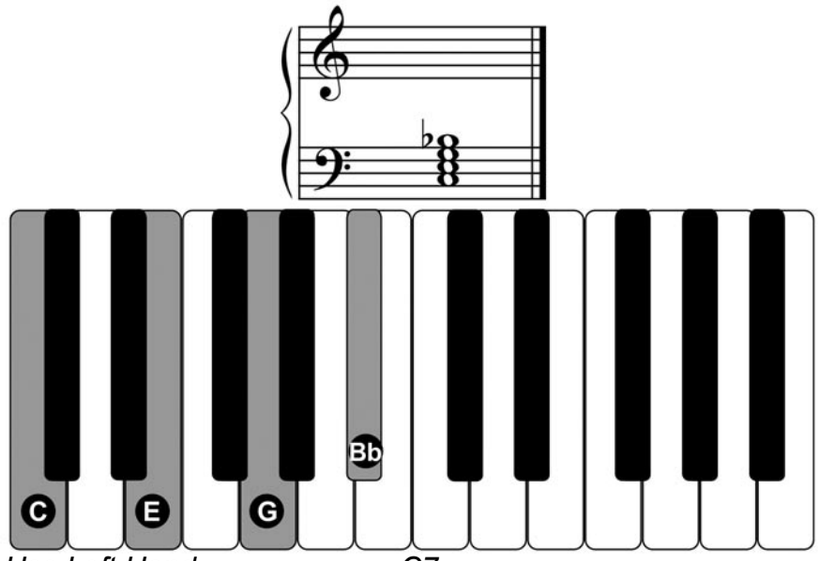
Now put your thumb on C an octave higher, play all four notes of the chord together. It’s a bit of a stretch but you’ll get it.



CMaj W/Octave

Now try moving your thumb down a whole step to Bb, which is the flattened seventh in the C scale, also called the dominant seventh (count and play seven notes up the C scale, then flat the B to Bb) and play all four notes together again.

This chord is named **C7**, a dominant 7 chord that is used in most forms of music, including Folk, Blues, Rock, and Jazz.



Use Left Hand *C7*

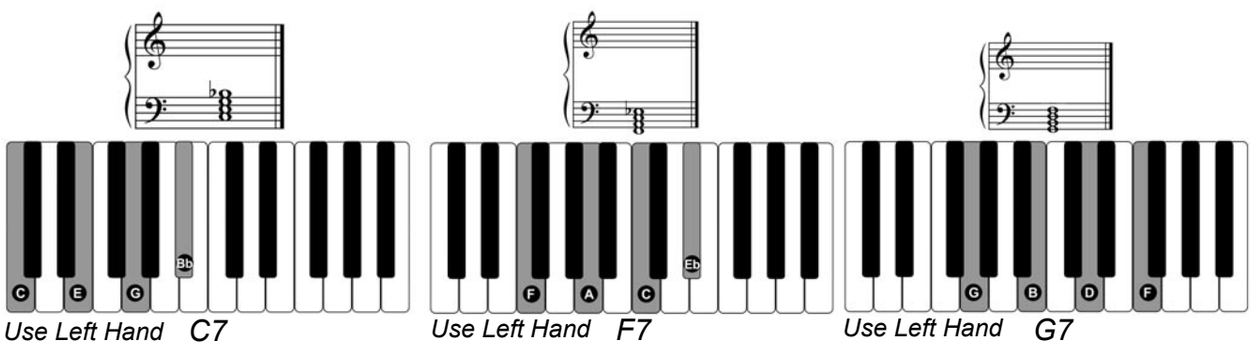
1,4,5 Chord Sequence:

Let's try a basic sequence that is used a lot in Blues and Rock. This particular chord progression is often referred to as the 1, 4, 5 sequence.

Bandleaders sometimes hold up 1, 4, or 5 fingers, or other numbers, to represent the particular chord in the sequence they want the musicians to play. You don't see it used too much in Rock n Roll though. If the band members see somebody holding up a finger, they might get the wrong idea. This, of course, can result in complete chaos. At least, if the band leader holds up the wrong amount of fingers, everyone will sound the wrong chord together—assuming they can count to five, and one or more musicians aren't seeing double.

So let's work on the 1, 4, 5 sequence in the key of C. In the key of C, the 1 chord will have C as the root note. Count up four notes in the C major scale and you come to F, which is the 4 chord. Count up five notes in the C scale and you end on G, which would be the 5 chord. They call this the 5 chord because it's 5 notes up from the root.

For this exercise, let's make all the chords in the 1,4,5 sequence dominant seventh, or flat seventh chords, which again you get by flattening the seventh note in the scale.



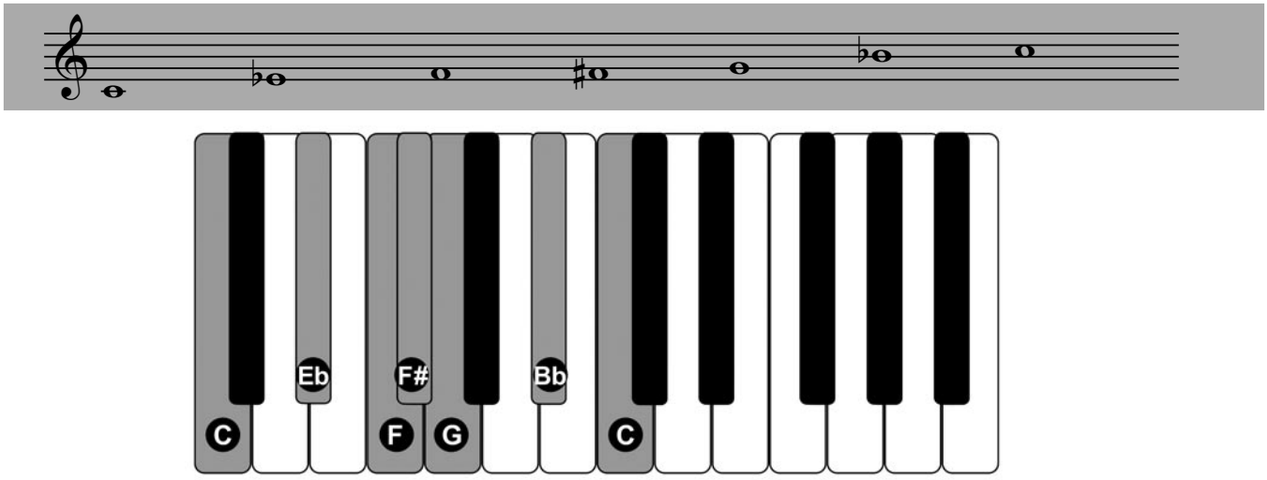
Use Left Hand *C7* *Use Left Hand* *F7* *Use Left Hand* *G7*

So in the key of C, let's start with the C7 chord .

Don't worry about the rhythm and bar count for now, just play each chord in sequence and let it hang while you play the **C blues scale** with your right hand.

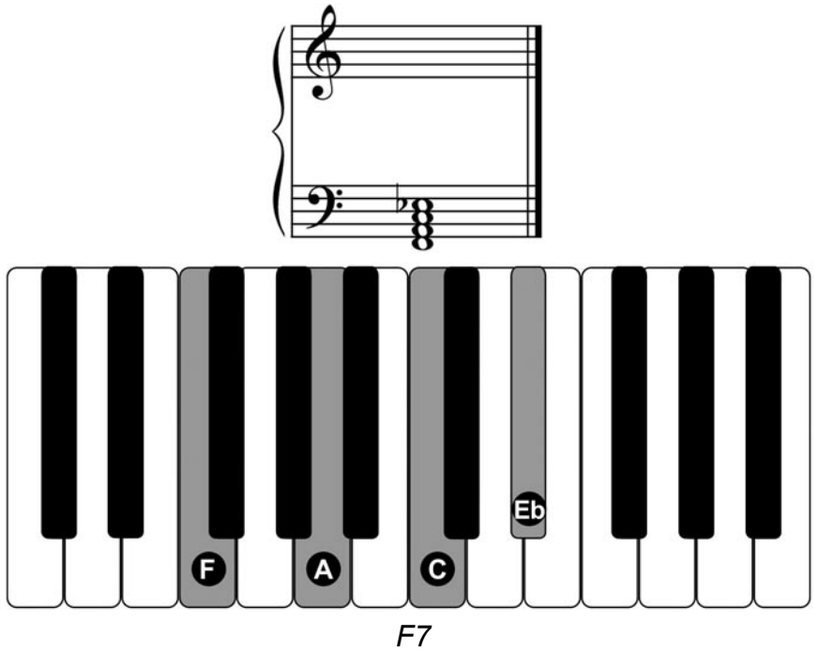
Start by playing a C7 chord with your left hand. Let it hang.

Play the blues scale up and down with your right.



C Blues Scale

Then with your left hand play the four chord, which again in C major happens to be F, and is found by counting up four notes in the major scale. But we'll play it an octave lower.



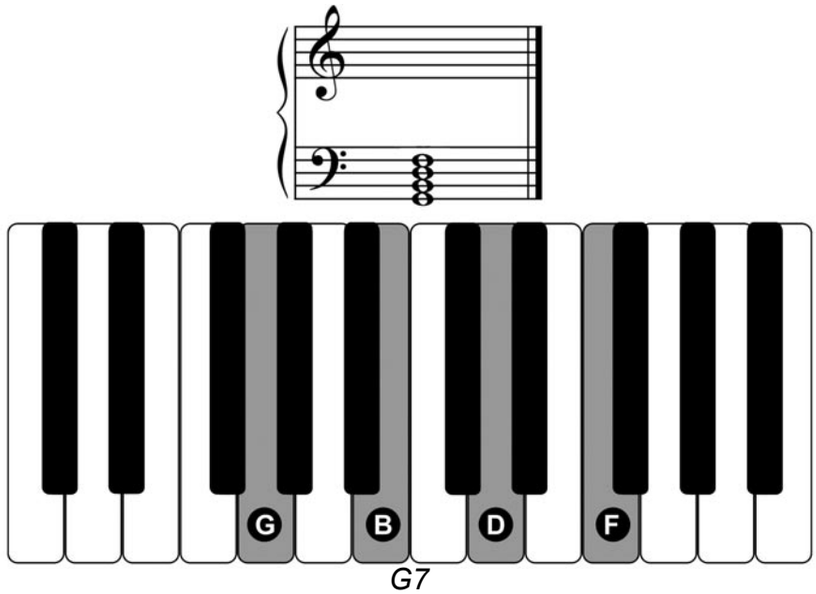
F7

Continue playing the C blues scale with your right hand.

Then back to C7 again, the 1 chord.

Continue playing the blues scale up and down while you play these chords.

Then play **G7** which is the five chord and carry on with C blues scale.



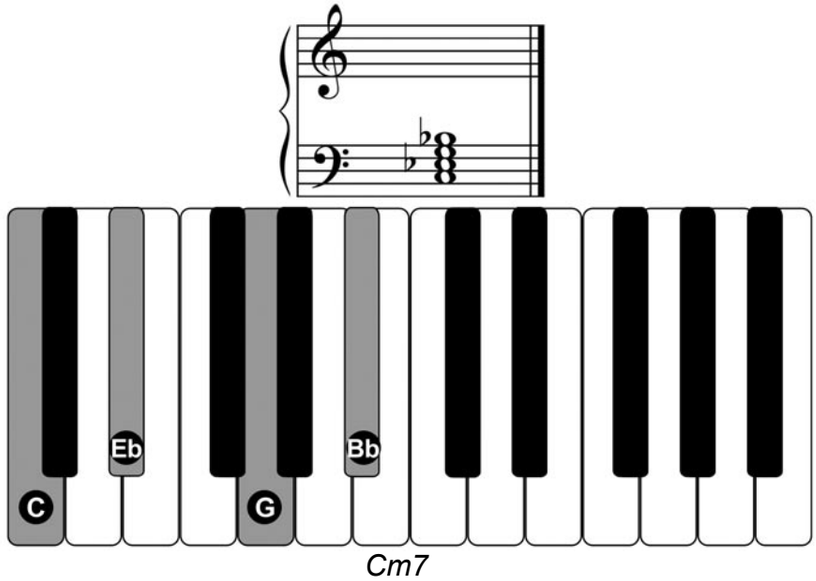
G7

Now play an F7 again, which is the 4 chord. Continue the blues scale with your right hand. Then finally the 1 chord again, C7. You can sometimes play the 5 chord again, G7 as a turnaround back into the 1. Or just stay on the 1. Then begin the sequence all over again. Remember, play F7 and G7 an octave lower, away from your right hand blues scale.

Practice the 1, 4, 5 sequence until you're reasonably comfortable with it. Later you can begin working out your favorite blues or rock licks with your right hand, using the notes in the blues scale. Again, you'll notice that any combination of notes in the blues scale works with the chords of this sequence; and remember you can play the blues scale in any octave with your right hand.

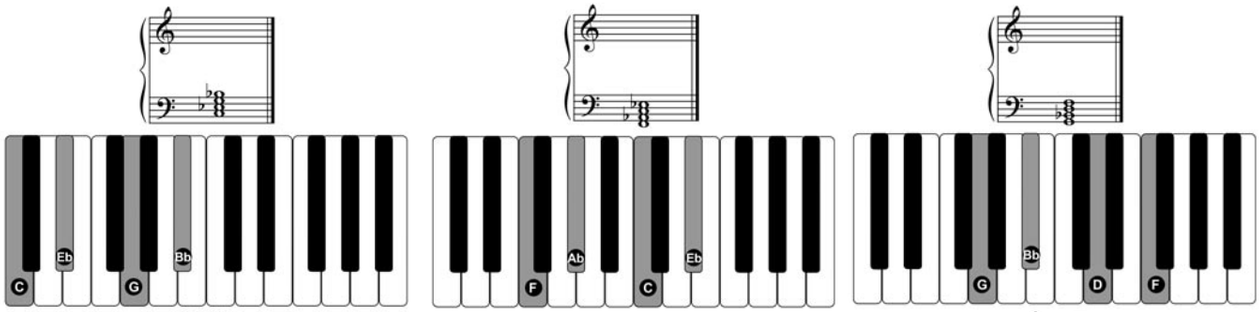
Minor seven chords:

Now try playing C7 again, but this time flat the third to Eb to make it a minor chord. We touched on C minor earlier but it really sounds nice with the minor seventh in the chord. This creates the chord Cm7 which has a very different mood than the major chord. Try playing the blues scale on top of it.



Cm7

Let’s play a similar 1, 4, 5 sequence to the one you just worked on but flat the third of each chord in the sequence.

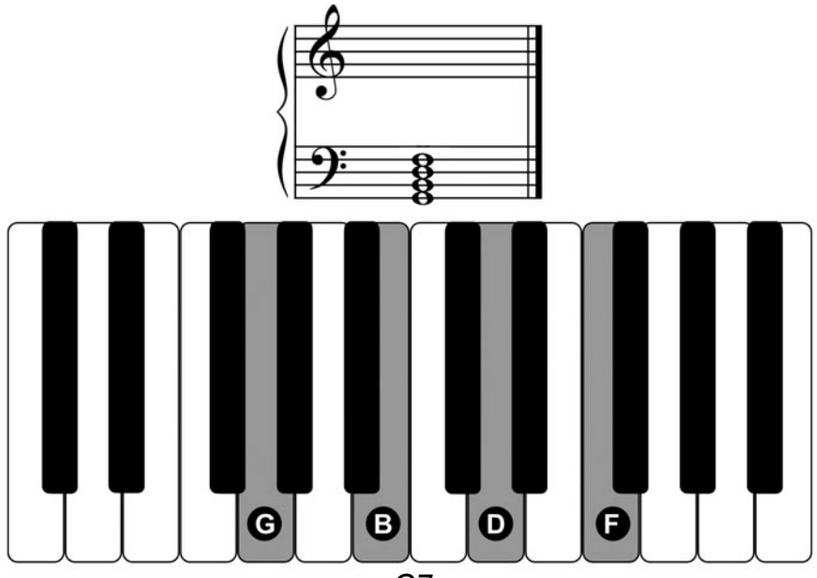


Cm7 *Fm7* *Gm7*

Play the Cm7 chord with your left hand, hold it down and let it ring, and play the blues scale with your right hand in between chords, then the 4 chord, Fm7, back to Cm7, back to the 4 chord again, Fm7, the one chord, Cm7, now the 5 chord, Gm7, then Fm7, Cm7, and turn around on the 5, Gm7.

Then begin the sequence all over again.

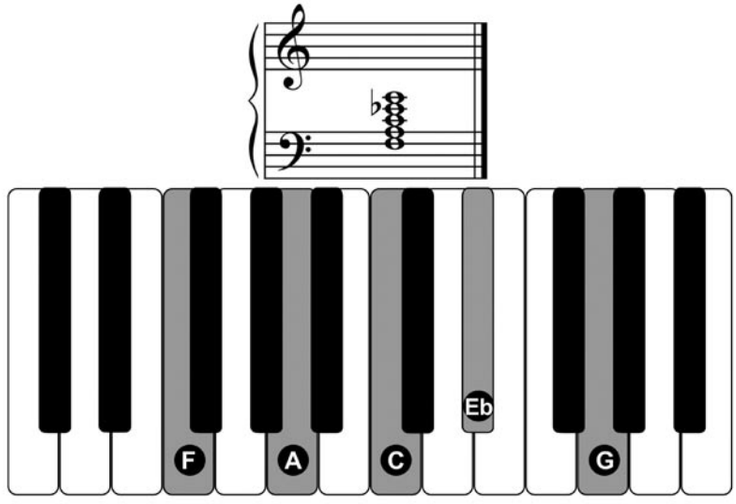
Practice this for a while, then try substituting G7 instead of Gm7 on the turnaround. The last 5 chord.



G7

Playing a nine chord:

When you get to the 4 chord of a 1,4,5 blues sequence, try playing a 1 minor with your right hand and the 4-chord root note on the bass with your left. This will create a 9 chord, which sounds nice in a blues sequence. So if you are playing a major blues in C, and it's time to play the 4 chord which is an F, play an F note with your left hand, and switch to a Cm chord with your right by flatting the 3rd, which because of the F root, makes it an **F9** chord.

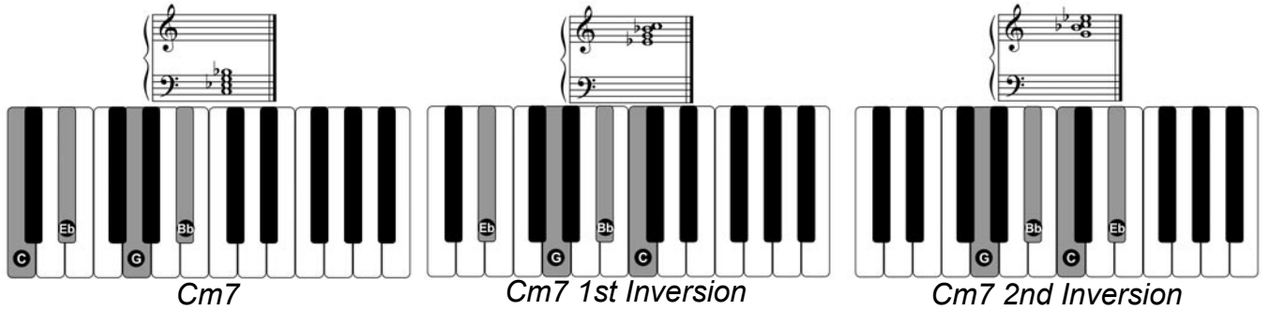


F9

If you analyze the chord you'll see you have the chords root note F, the fifth C, the dominant seven Eb, and nine notes up from the root, G. It's not always necessary to play the root note of a chord. This can make building chords very interesting with many different possibilities, especially if you're playing with a band and the bass player is taking care of the root note.

Chord Inversions:

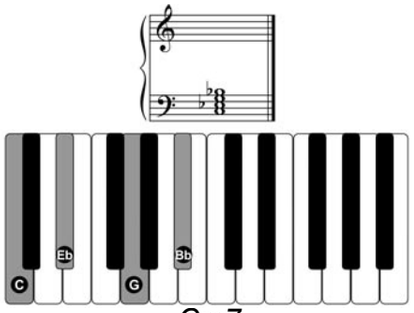
Here are some variations on Cm7. You just use the same notes of the chord structure but starting higher up with different variations.



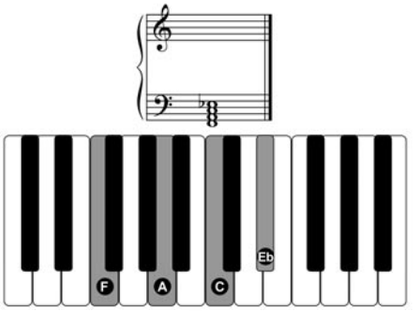
Cm7 *Cm7 1st Inversion* *Cm7 2nd Inversion*

The same chord and notes, but moving everything up.

Now let's practice just going back & forth from Cm7 to F7 for a bit. Not Fm7, but F7. You can then work out these chordal relationships along with the blues scale in other keys.



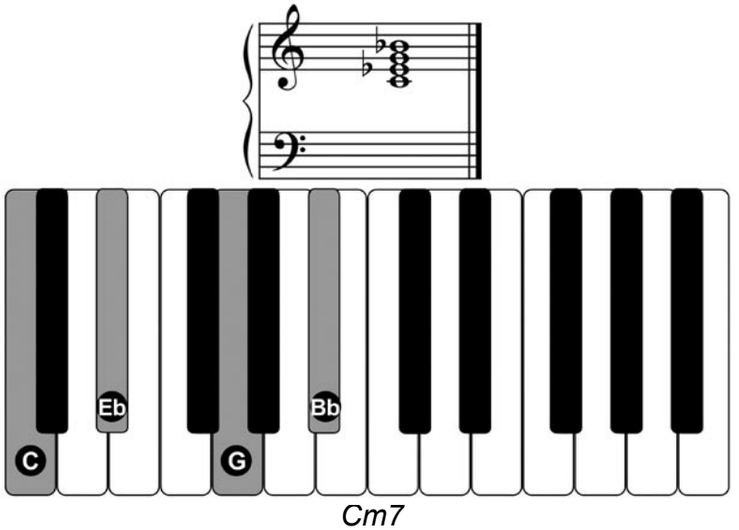
Cm7



F7

You can, of course, play any of these chords we've worked on an octave or more higher with your right hand, accompanied by bass notes on your left hand. The note relationships are the same. Once again, a diagram of the notes for a basic Cm7 for either hand looks like this.

The musical notation in this case is written in the treble clef, generally associated (but not always) with the right hand.



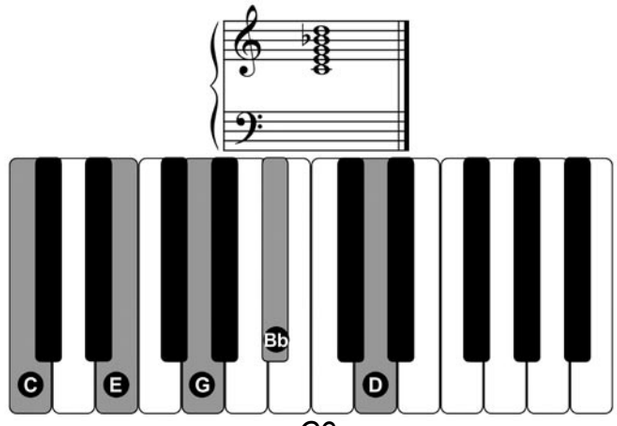
Cm7

As I mentioned before, if you want to start getting into other variations, just remember that you can work out the chords by counting up from the root note.

Let's reinforce how you work out a nine chord. If you want to play **C9** it simply means you count up nine notes from the root note C, ending on D just above the octave of C.

So for C9 you would play: C with your left hand, and E, G, the seventh Bb, and the D note with your right hand. The D note is the nine and defines the sound of the chord.

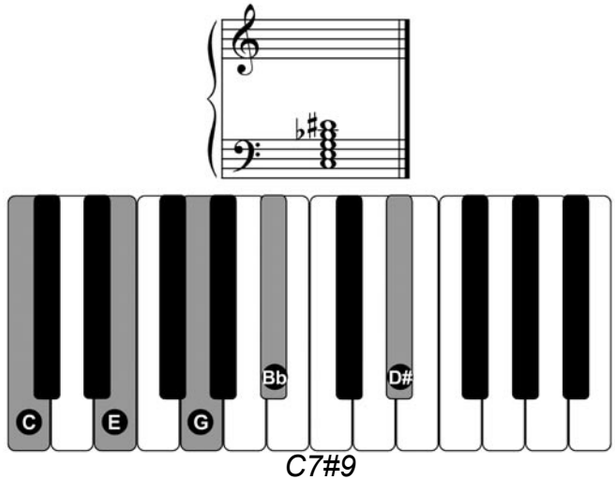
So you're playing a straight C7 with your left hand, playing the chord defining D note with your right thumb leaving the remaining fingers of your right hand to add other coloring tones to the chord. Here is a chart of C9.



C9

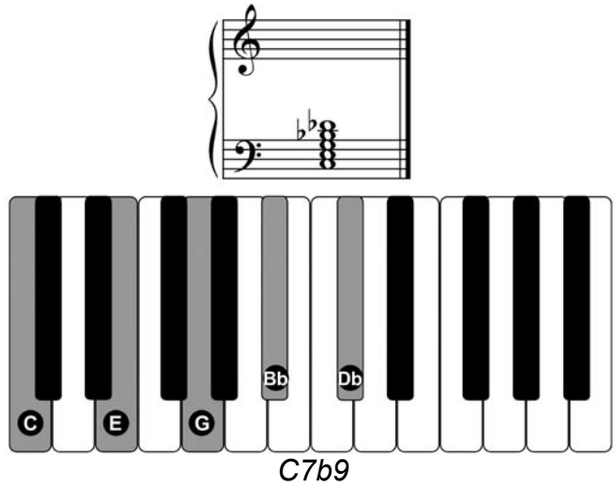
The music is written in the treble clef, for the right hand. But the notes of the keyboard diagram are the same for the left or right hand. Build the notes of these chords with both hands.

To recap, most 9 chords use the dominant flat seventh plus the nine, which in C would be D. You can work out a nine chord in any key by counting up from the root. If you raise the D note a half step to D# you get the chord **C7#9**, a very cool sounding chord.



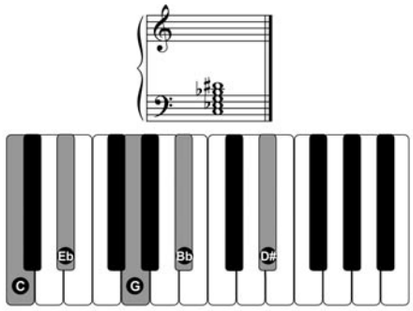
C7#9

If you flat the nine note, D to Db you create **C7b9**

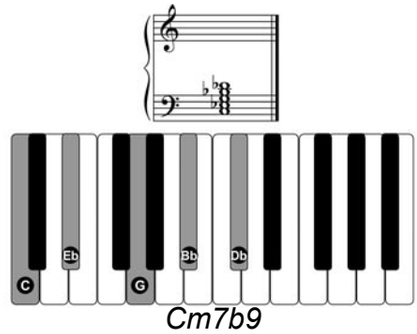


C7b9

Flat the third along with these variations and you get another whole set of different sounding Cm chords. Try: **Cm7#9** & **Cm7b9**



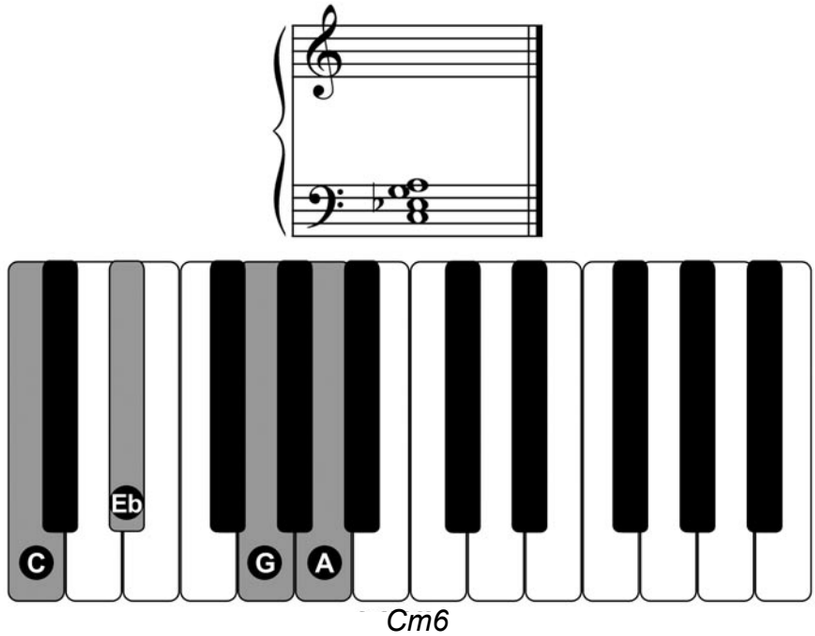
Cm7#9



Cm7b9

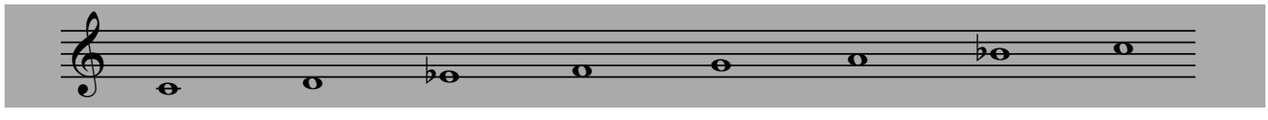
Now try slipping your thumb of your left hand down a half step from Bb to A.

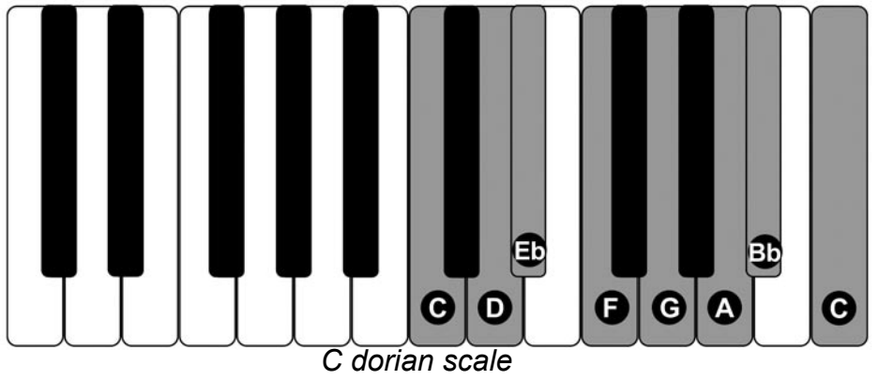
Lift your right hand off. The notes in this chord would be: C, Eb, G, and A which actually creates Cm6. A is the sixth note up from C in the C scale.



Cm6

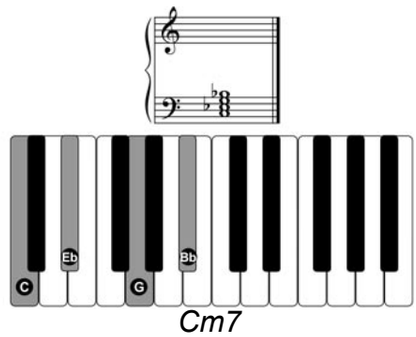
Try playing a Dorian scale to this chord by playing an A instead of an Ab. Which would be: C, D, Eb, F, G, A, Bb,





C dorian scale

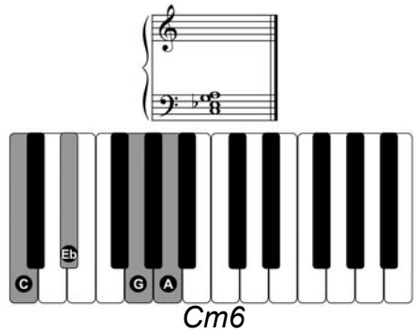
Try playing a regular Cm or Cm7 chord, and switching to the Aeolian natural minor scale with the Ab.



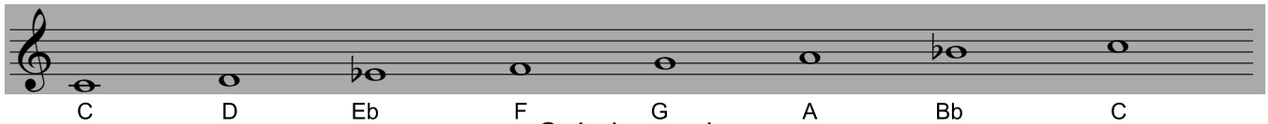
Cm7

C minor scale

Then play a Cm6 again using the Dorian scale with it's A natural note to match the chord.

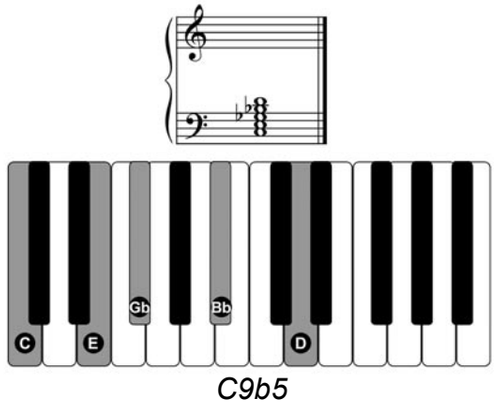


Cm6

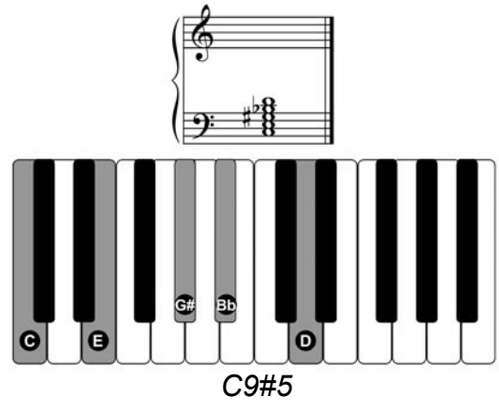


C dorian scale

Sometimes the chord symbol may also request you alter the fifth note of the chord in some way, perhaps a #5, or a b5. Try to work out which notes you would play if the chord were a C9#5 or a C9b5.

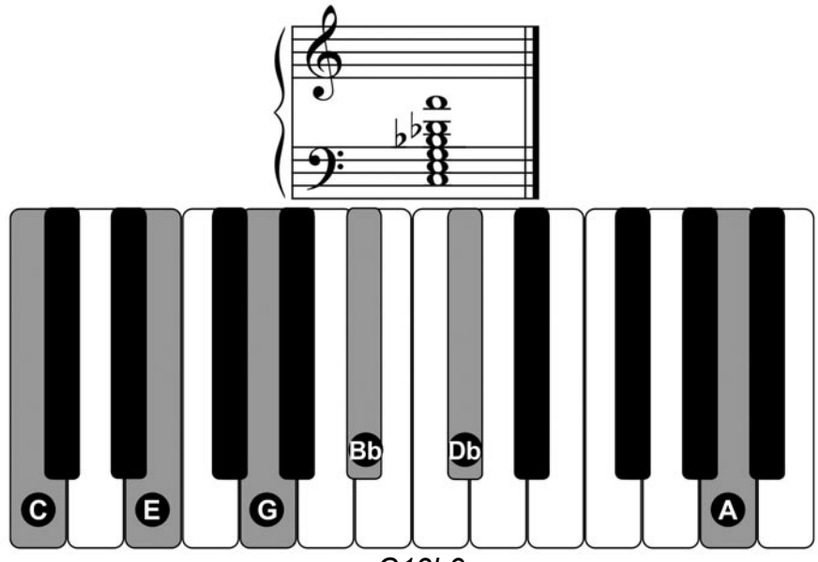


C9b5



C9#5

Let's try working out **C13b9**



C13b9

As I mentioned before, you will need both hands for some of these chords. The notes on top can often dictate the melody. Remember to count up from the root. So you would count thirteen notes up from the root of the chord, in this case C, which lands you on A.

Play C9 and flat the D to Db to make Cb9, then simply add A, the 13th note. C13b9.

If you want to solo using these chords for accompaniment, and unless you're Art Tatum reincarnated, it's unlikely you will be able to play all these chords with your left hand only. So try building the chords from the 3rd instead of the root. For instance, you could build C#9 with your little finger on E, with the thumb on the sharp 9, D#. The bass player will hopefully be taking care of the root.

Later, you can try rolling the notes of a large chord to get them all in with just your left hand, or comp a rich chord with both hands and proceed to solo with your right. Perhaps playing a bass note with your left. All in syncopated rhythm. Right!

Remember that all these chordal variations apply to building chords from scales in any key, whether the root is a white note or a black note. Later on you can mess around with making up your own voicings.

Try to keep a spirit of adventure and exploration in your playing and approach to music in general. This is essential to becoming an interesting player regardless of your musical style and skill level. I always enjoyed listening to piano players like **Champion Jack Dupree**, or **Memphis Slim** who weren't afraid to use humor in their approach to soloing as well as taking risks. Jazz pianists like **Art Tatum** and **Bill Evans** explored the tonal qualities of the keyboard with amazing technical skill. Other great jazz players to listen to are **Herbie Hancock**, **Chic Corea**, and one of my personal favorites, **Oscar Peterson**.

Musicians like my old friend, the late great **Nicky Hopkins** took rock piano to new heights when working with bands like **The Rolling Stones**, **The Jeff Beck Band** and **The Beatles**.

Johnny Johnson inspired a whole generation of rock piano players by bridging the gap between the blues and rock with his work on the classic **Chuck Berry** albums of the late fifties, and early sixties. There was no finer gentleman, or class act than **Johnny Johnson**.

Another important piano player to bridge the gap between Gospel, Blues, R&B and Rock n Roll is **Little Richard**. He doesn't sing too bad either. **Pine Top Perkins,** who played with **Muddy Waters,** is another great player, and also a wonderful person. There are many great keyboard players you can turn to for inspiration, **Mose Allison**, **Garth Hudson**, **Chuck Leavell**, **Mark Naftlain**, **Bill Payne**, **Brad Mehldau**, all great players in their own right.

Jefferson Starship, Golden Gate Park, 1979.
Photo by Ed Perlstein

"Pete Sears is a good example of today's virtuosity on all keyboards."
***Francis Clay** (Muddy Water Blues Band, Buddy Guy, Gene Ammons, James Cotton)*

A haiku for a master musician

'lectric acoustic explosions of true love light, Pete Sears in the house.

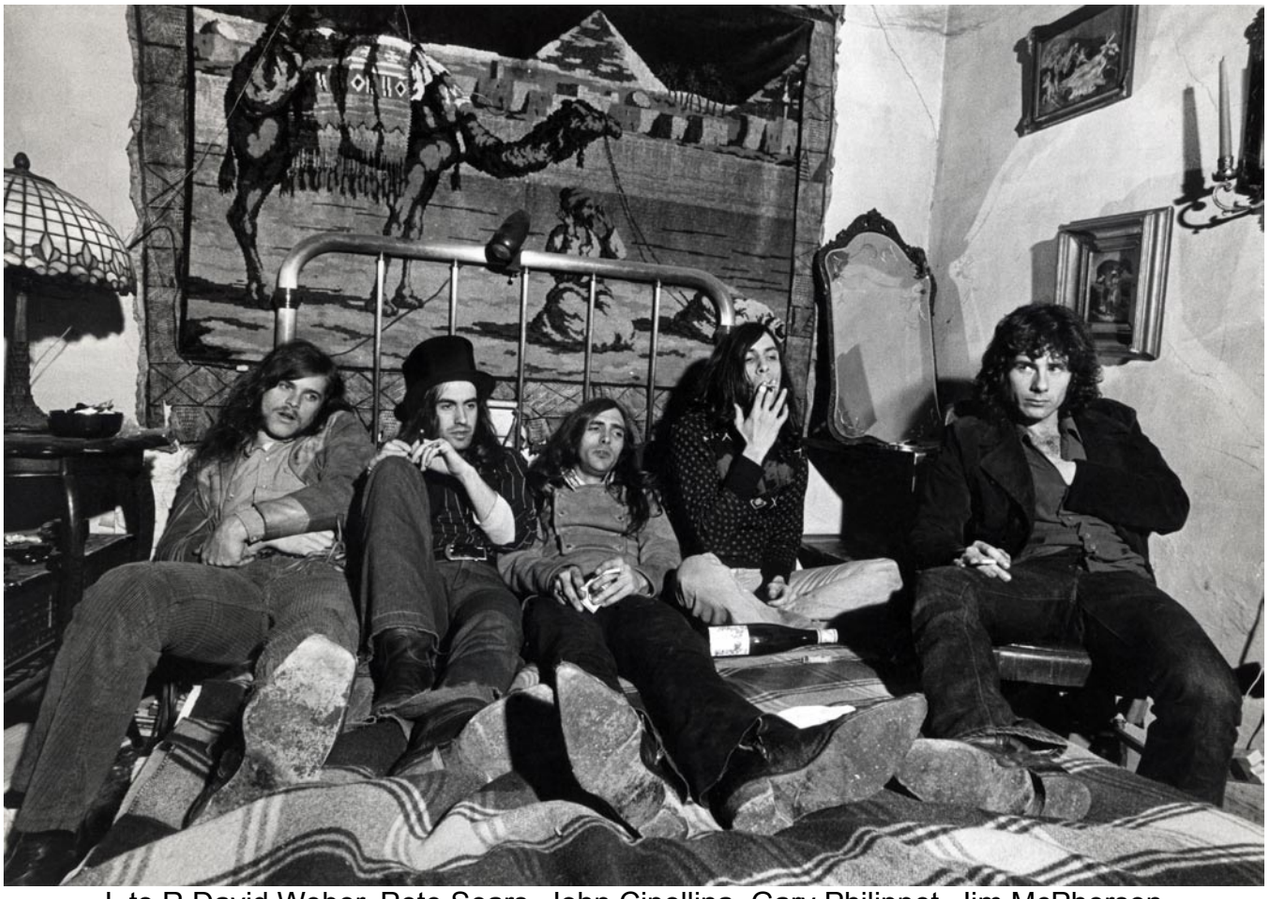
- **W. GRAVY** *June 2007*

Pete Sears and Wavy Gravy, SEVA Benefit, Grand Ballroom, San Francisco. 2007

Photo by Paul Auday

Solo concert, Tokyo, Japan. 2000

Photo by Saito Tamotsu



L to R David Weber, Pete Sears, John Cipollina, Gary Philippet, Jim McPherson
Original Copperhead, 1971

“I have had the great pleasure to play with Pete on a number of occasions and I can tell you he is a great player. He can get as deep into the blues as you want to get or he can rock you like mad. He can seriously move you”.
- Charlie Musselwhite

Flying a Stearman over Sonoma County.
Photo credit © Courtesy Roger Ressmeyer

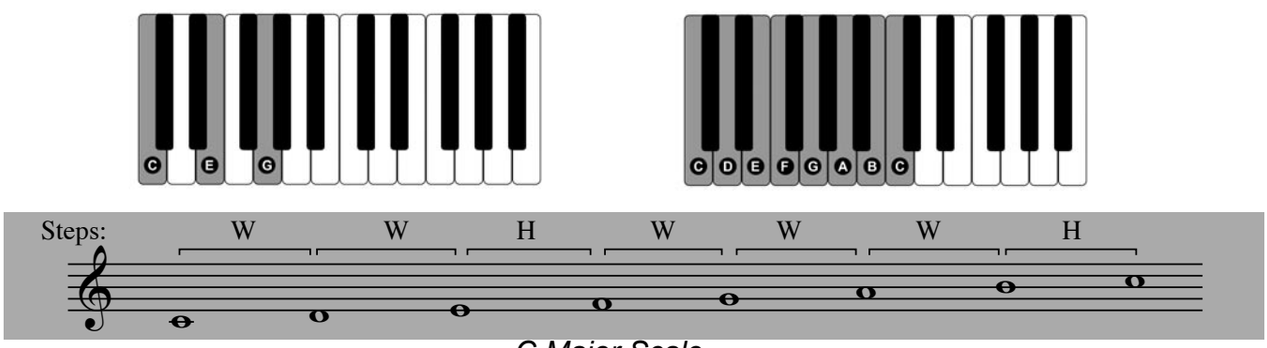
Scale Patterns & Progressions:

Whenever you get a chance, I suggest you pick a note in the chromatic scale:

C C# D D# E F F# G G# A A# B and use it as the root note for a new key to practice scales and build chords with. Remember, you build scales for any key by working out the intervals from one note to the next using the type of step pattern that relates to the particular type of scale and chord you want to play. Major, minor, diminished, etc.

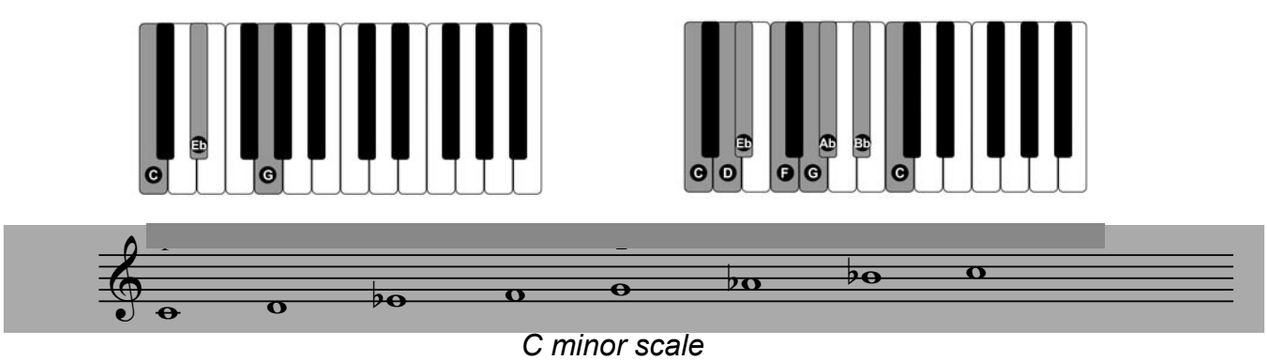
Once again, here are a few step patterns to work with:

Play the chord, then the scale.



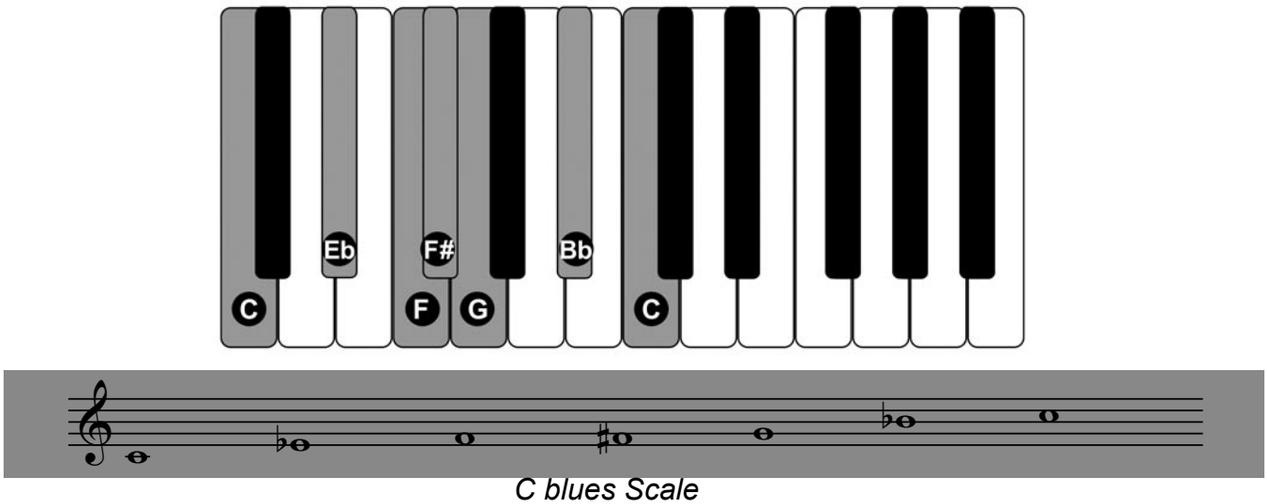
C Major Scale

Minor scales flat the third note of the scale.



C minor scale

Whole step - Half step - Whole step - Whole step - Half step – Whole step – Whole



C blues Scale

Whole step + half - Whole step - Half step - Half step - Whole step + half - Whole step

Remember to practice working out basic triad chords with your left hand. Using your little finger, also called the fifth finger on the root note, play the chord and hold it down letting it sustain. Then begin practicing the scale you've worked out with your right hand beginning with the root note, and paying particular attention to the correct fingering that we worked on earlier. For scales, remember to play the root note with the thumb, also referred to as the first finger, and ascending through the scales step pattern with your remaining fingers, bringing your thumb under, etc. It'll be slow going at first, but will soon become easier. Even if you practice this a little bit every day you will notice a considerable advance in your playing skills and knowledge of the keyboard. Try working in one key for a few days then move on to another for a bit.

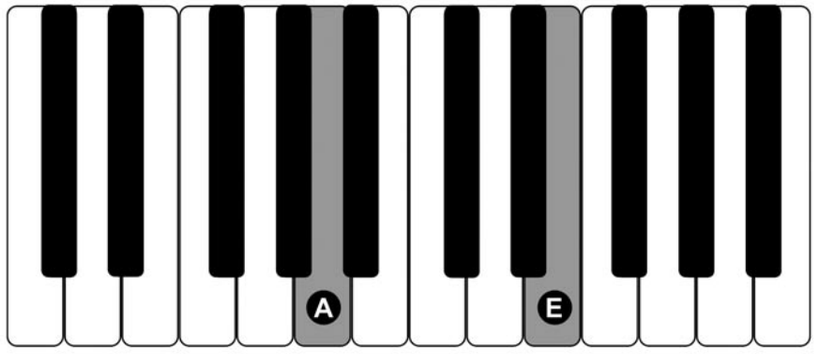
Left Hand Blues Riff:

A cool riff for the left hand, which works well on the keyboard or the guitar, is a line often associated with **Jimmy Reed**, as well as one of the early pioneers of rock, **Chuck Berry**. This riff most likely originated in the blues, and was used extensively in the music of players like **Jimmy Rogers**, **Elmore James**, and **Freddy King**. It was probably adapted, in spirit at least, from the music of early blues legends like **Charley Patton**, **Leadbelly** and **Robert Johnson**.

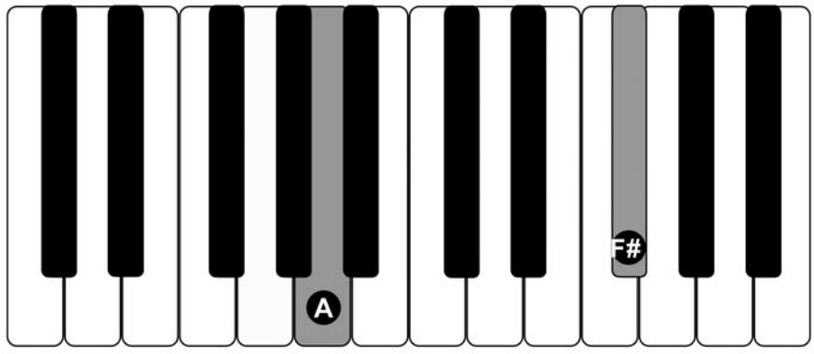
It's a line most of you will have heard many times in countless forms of rock, from the **Rolling Stones** to **The Grateful Dead**, as well as bands as diverse as **AC/DC**, **Cream**, **Savoy Brown**, **Three Dog Night**, **The Eagles**, **Guns and Roses**, or **Alvin Youngblood Hart**, all of whom owe their roots in large part to the Blues.

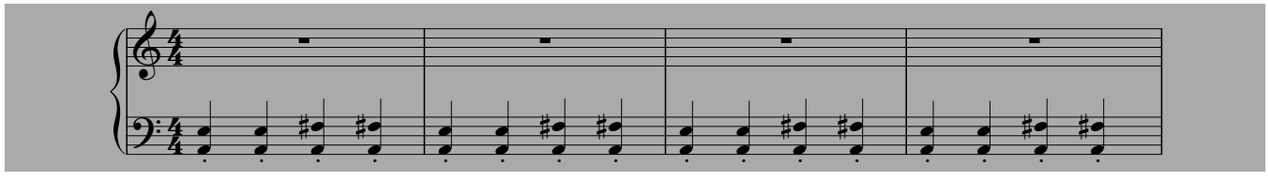
When played on the piano, this riff fits in with the boogie style. Or as my old friend, **Long John Baldry** used to say, "Booogie Woogie".

Let's work this one out in something other than C for a change. How about the key of A, although you can certainly play it just as well in C or any other key. It's all just a matter of intervals.
To work it out in A, you place the fifth finger of your left hand on A, a couple of octaves down from middle C. Then your second finger on E which is five notes up from the root note A.



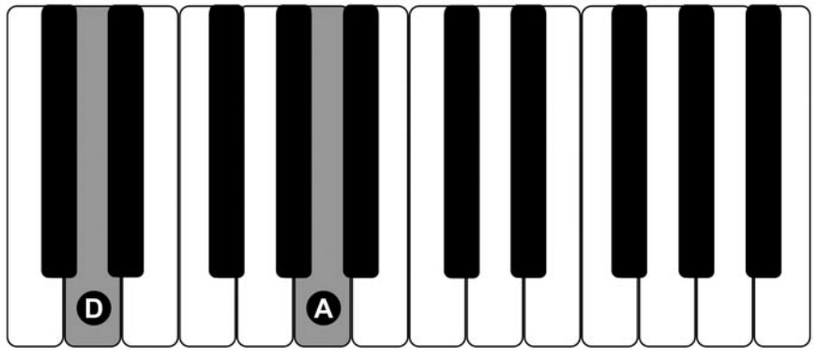
Play those two notes together at the same time twice, then move your thumb up to F# and play the root note A with the F# for another two hits. Then back to A and E again.

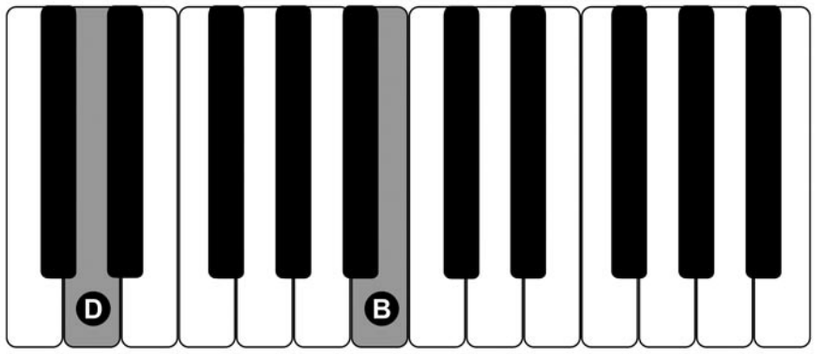


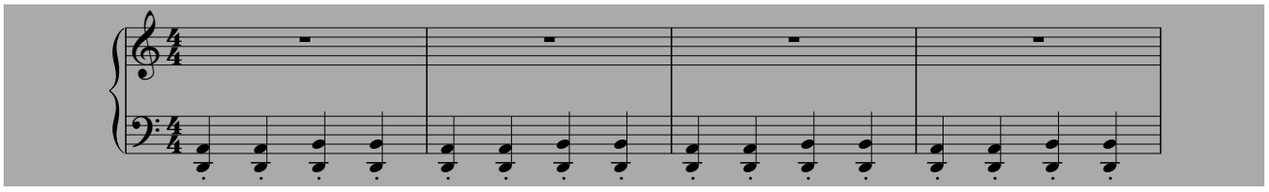


Alternate back and forth between the two. Practice this for a while. Don't worry if you have trouble playing a rhythm with your left hand at first, this will gradually come through practice. Just let the chords breath and enjoy the tones. Always try to let the music breath.

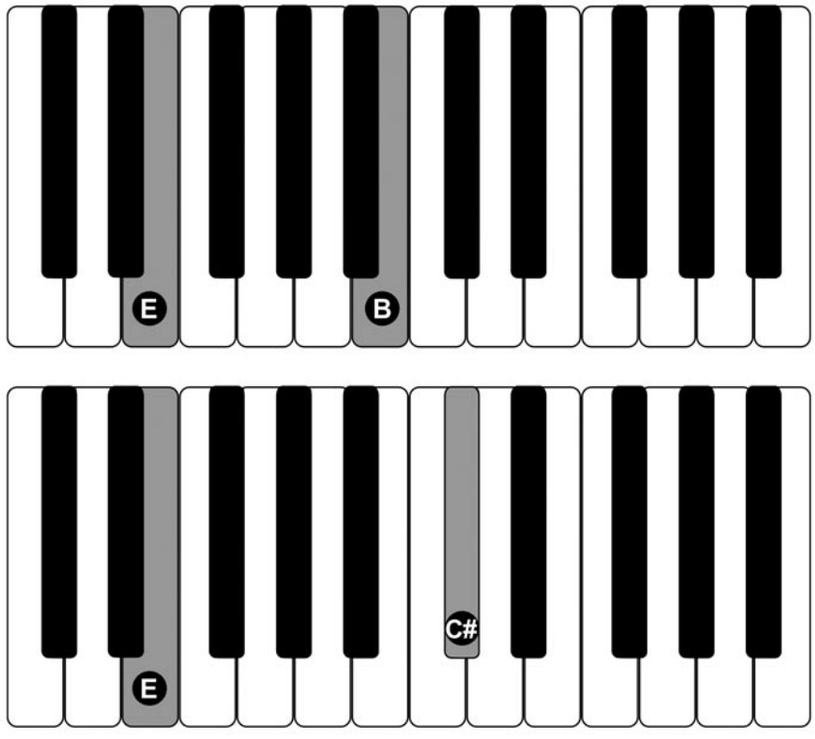
Now move up four notes to what we call the 4 chord, which in the key of A is D, and play the same riff in D, an octave lower. The note relationships are the same. Practice this for a bit.







Then back to A, the 1 chord. Now Go up five whole steps to E, the 5 chord. Play this for a while. You should play this E riff an octave lower.



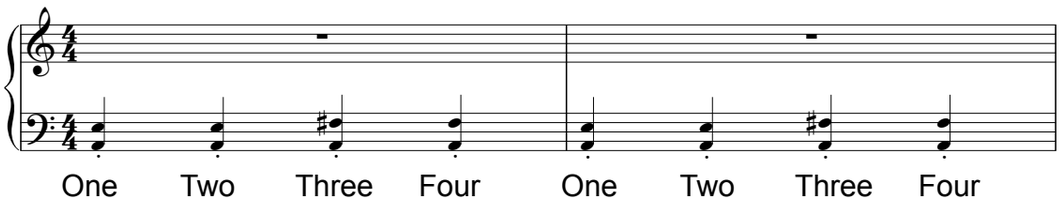
Back down to the 4 chord, D. Practice on D for a bit.

Then the 1 chord, A again.

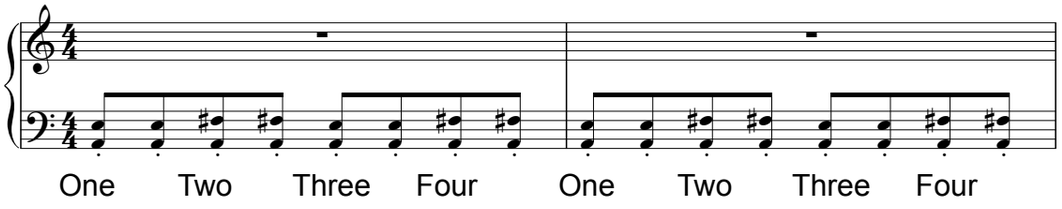
And the 5 chord again if you want a turnaround.

After you feel comfortable with the riff, begin tapping your foot in a steady four beats to the bar rhythm, counting, ONE-Two-Three-Four. ONE-Two-Three-Four, accenting the one of each bar.

These are called **quarter notes** because it takes four quarter notes to make up one whole four beat bar. This is the 4/4 time signature, or 4 beats to the bar.



If you split each beat in half you get eighth notes, twice as many beats to the bar.



Try playing this **Jimmy Ree/Chuck Berry** riff wth eighth notes. Put a little swing into it to give it a shuffle feel. Practice this for a while.

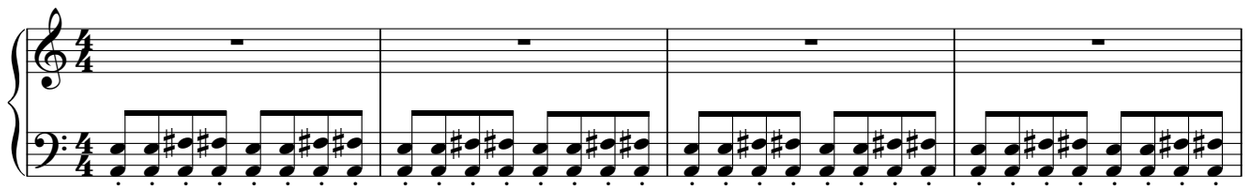
While we're on the subject of rhythm, a good drummer, (I was going to say confident, but I've known a few very confident but horrible drummers) is, of course, incredibly important in the area of dynamics. Drummers are the glue that hold everything together. It's a wonderful experience to play with a quality drummer, one who listens and is able to lead with light and shade in the music as well as hitting the snare in the right place. It can make or break a band. Listen to the feel of **Charlie Watts**, or **Levon Helm**.

My old friend, **Micky Waller,** is another example. Listen to his feel on the **Rod Stewart** classic recording of "Sweet Little Rock n Roller". I played piano on the track along with **Ron Wood** and Micky's dog, whose barks were recorded live with the basic track.

Now let's play a standard **twelve bar blues** sequence with this riff in the key of A. These 1, 4, 5 relationships will work in any key, of course. We'll start off counting four bars playing the **Jimmy Reed** riff off the root note A. This is also referred to as the 1 chord. If we were playing in the key of C, C would be the 1 chord. But we're playing this one in A.

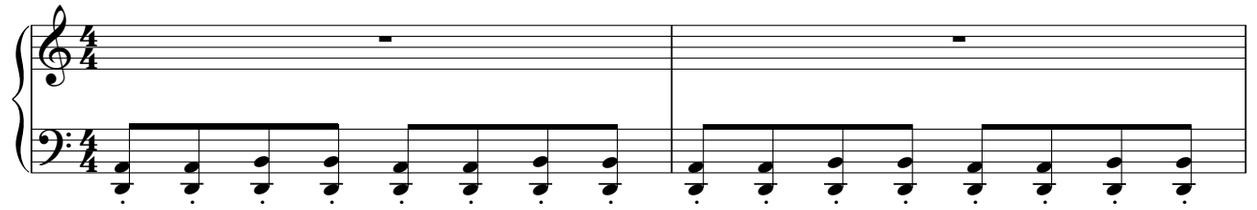
Place your fingers on the keys ready to go. Do a 2 bar count in, then begin playing the riff. One, two, three, four. One, two, three, four.

Shuffle Feel:

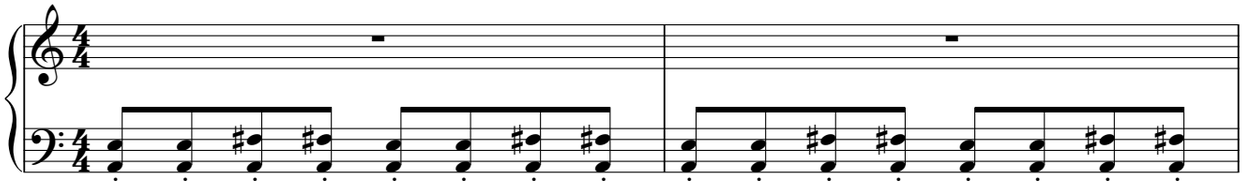


Play the riff for 4 bars.

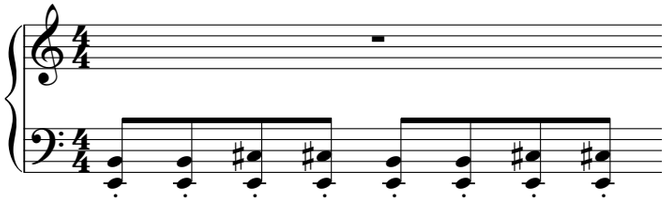
Now to D for two bars.



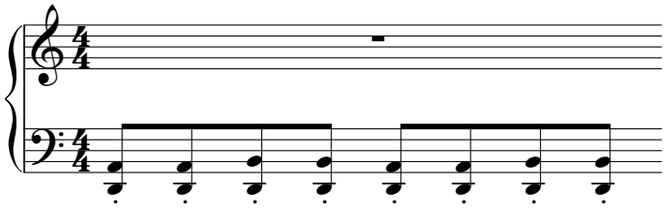
Back to A for two bars.



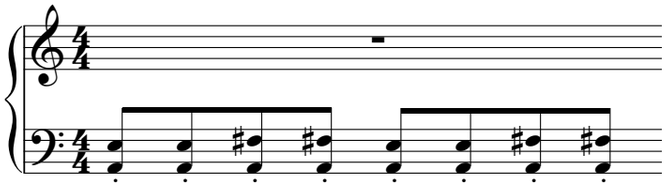
Up to E for one bar.



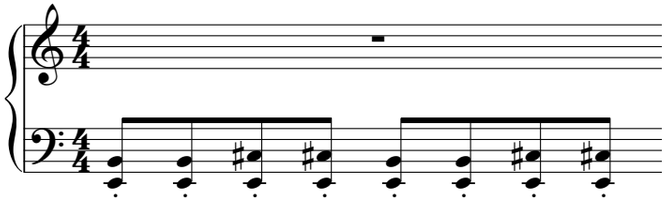
Play D for one bar.



Back to A for one bar.



Finish on E for one bar.



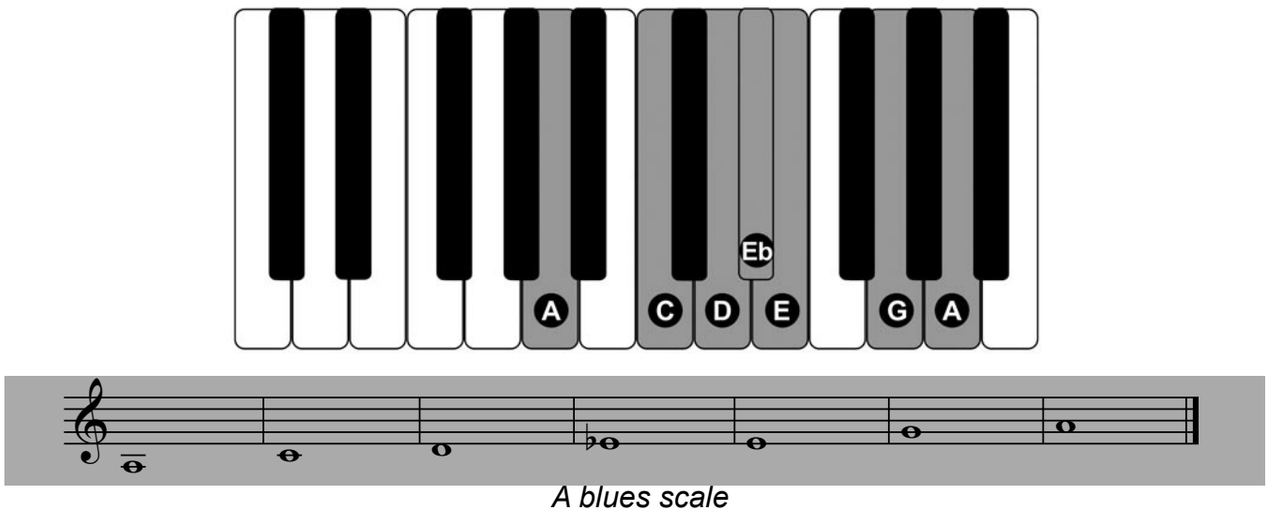
This makes twelve bars altogether. Then you start counting the sequence all over again. The last bar, or twelfth bar, is also referred to as the Turn Around. Sometimes the music doesn't require you to play a turnaround on the 5 chord. You can just play the 1 chord, in this case A, for the eleventh and twelfth bars.

Once you get this left hand riff going so you don't have to think about it too much (which may take some practice) you can start messing around on the blues scale with your right hand.

Remember the step pattern for the Blues scale is:

Whole step + half, Whole step, Half step, Half step, Whole step + half, whole step

So the blues scale in A would be: **A, C, D, Eb, E, G, A**



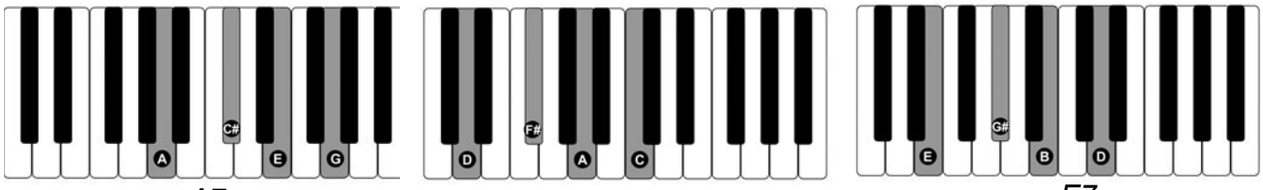
A blues scale

Try stringing different notes in the scale together to create your own melodies based on various blues riffs you may have heard. This is called improvising. The notes in the blues scale will work through all the 1, 4, 5 changes you are playing with your left hand.

When ascending the scale in a blues you can sometimes play the major third instead of the flat third, followed by the fifth and sixth. But on the way down the scale play the minor third. You can roll a couple of notes into the third if you like how it sounds. In A that would be a B and a C leading up to the C#, which is the third of A. Also, it doesn't really sound right if you play the major third in the blues scale while playing the 4 or 5 chords in the sequence. Let's just use the regular minor blues scale for now.

Of course you can, and no doubt will do anything you want after you become more familiar with the keyboard. You should also practice incorporating chords into your improvisational lead lines.

Try working on a blues in A with your left hand playing the twelve bar, 1, 4, 5, blues rock riff you've just learned, and your right hand playing an A7 chord.



A7 *D7* *E7*

Notice you can add the seventh on the bottom of a seventh chord with your thumb. Then when it's time to go to the 4 chord, D, with your left hand, try playing an A minor chord with the right. This creates the bluesy sounding D9 chord.

Then go back to the 1 chord A. For the 5 chord you play an **E7**, back to **D7**, finally, back to A.

When you're comfortable with this, let's try the sequence again in A, but playing chords instead of the riff with your left hand. Improvising an A minor blues scale with your right like you did before.

Again, the blues scale in A is: A, C, D, Eb, E, G, A

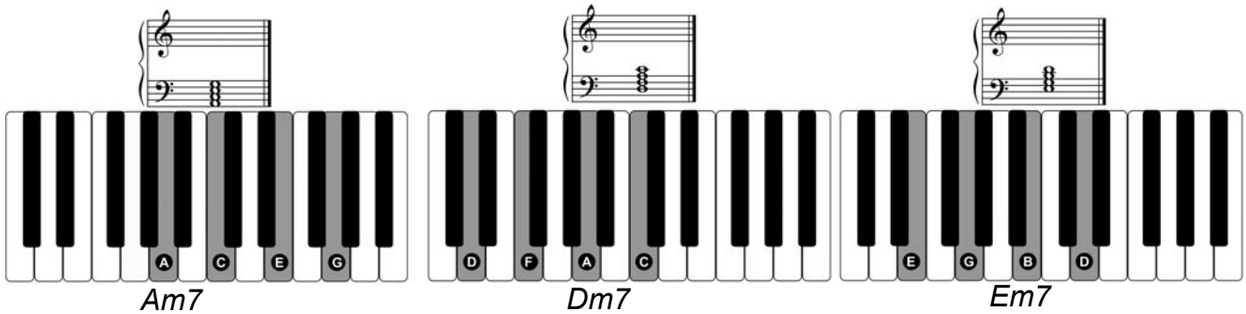
Play A7, let it hang, and improvise with the blues scale.

A minor Slow Blues:

As I mentioned before, you can also use the 1, 4, 5 chord sequence using minor chords instead of major chords. Just flat the third notes of each chord and play a lazy, moody slow blues.

Play the chords with your left hand so you can improvise blues licks with your right.

The chords would be:



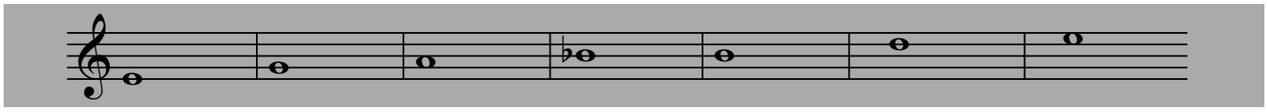
Am7 *Dm7* *Em7*

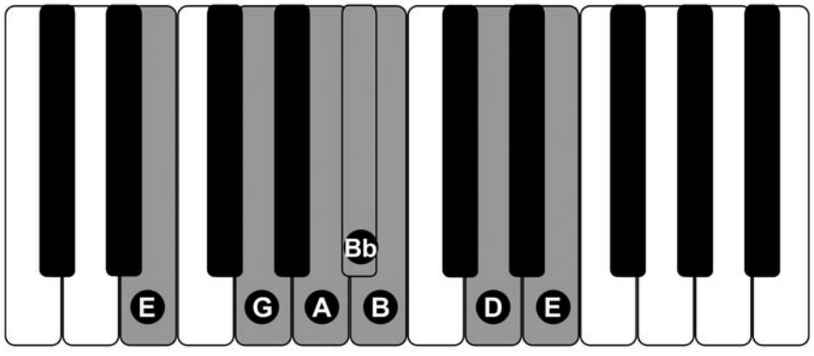
For an **A minor7** chord you play the notes, A, C, E & G (the seventh) with your left hand for the 1 chord. Sound Am once, letting the chord ring out nice and easy. Use your right hand to improvise the A minor blues scale.

Now play the 4 chord Dm7. The notes for Dm7 are: D, F, A, C. Continue to improvise with your right hand. Back to the 1 chord. Am7. Continue playing blues licks with your right hand. Then the 5 chord, which is Em7 (E, G, B, D). Back to the 4 chord, Dm7. Then, back to the 1 chord Am7

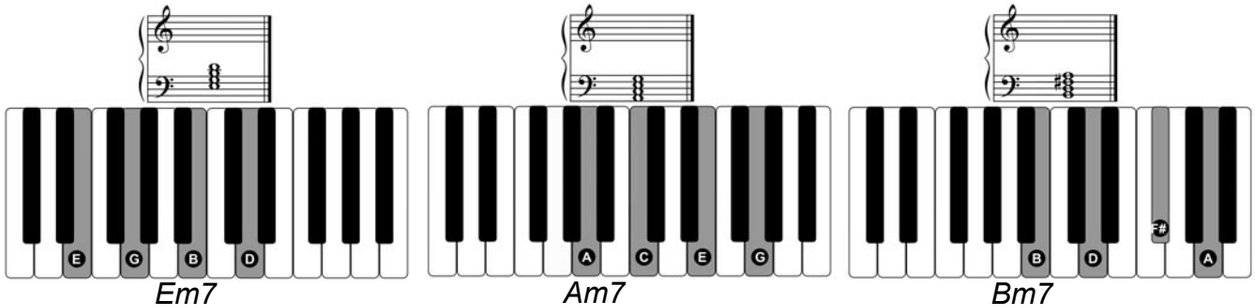
Now try the same sequence in Em improvising the blues scale in E.

Remember the step patterns for a particular scale will give you the right notes to play in any key. Just start the patterns on the root note.





E blues scale

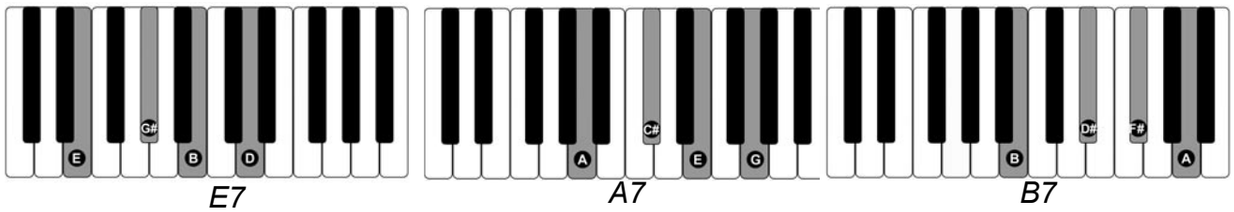


Em7 *Am7* *Bm7*

Em or **Em7** for the 1 chord, **Am7** for the 4 chord, and **Bm7** the 5 chord.

Try this chord sequence again without flatting the third of each chord.

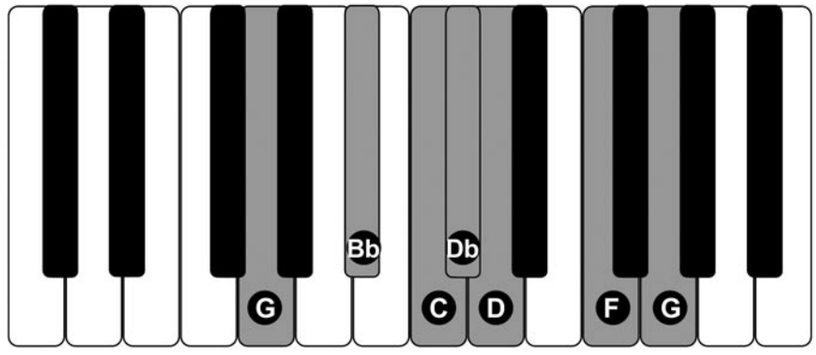
So you'll be playing **E7**, **A7** and **B7** in the blues progression.



E7 *A7* *B7*

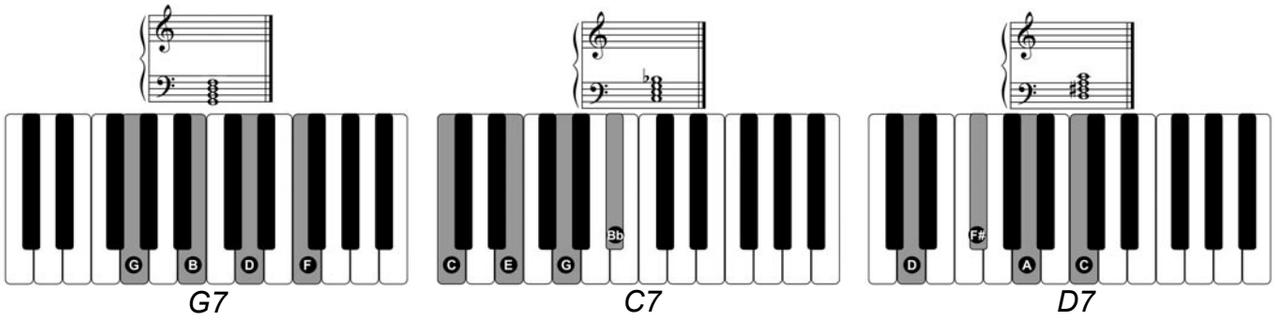
Again, use the same right hand E blues scale to improvise with.

Now try the sequence in the key of G, and riffing on the G blues scale with your right hand.



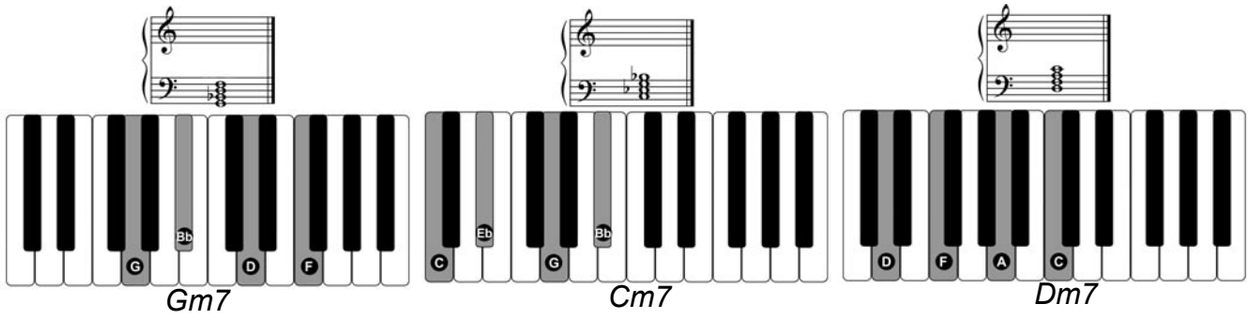
G blues scale

G would be the 1 chord. C7 the 4 chord and D7 the 5.



G7 *C7* *D7*

Then again in G minor.



Gm7 *Cm7* *Dm7*

If you’re feeling brave, try to work out the whole thing in Bb. (no pressure though)
Remember, the Step Pattern relationships are the same in any key.

Grace Notes:

Most players also like to play grace notes, or passing notes to spice things up a bit.

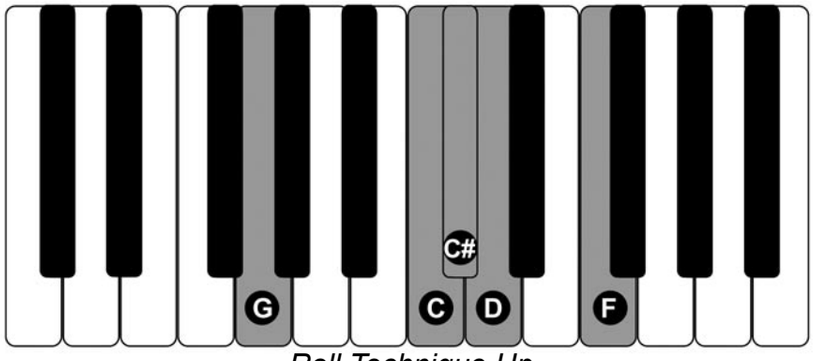
The Blues, which many consider to be the roots of Rock and Jazz, often use the guitar to wrench emotion from the music by bending the strings up to pitch during a solo. Listen to **BB King**, **Albert King**, or **Freddy King,** as well as some of the great blues influenced rock musicians like, **Jimi Hendrix**, **Eric Clapton**, **Jeff Beck**, **Keith Richards**, **Rich Kirch**, **Ron Wood** and **Jorma Kaukonen**.

The Saxophone, Harmonica, and Trumpet can also use the soulful bending of tones to great effect. If you get a chance, listen to **Coltrane**, **Charlie Musselwhite** or **Miles Davis**.

Another method of pitch bending that has been used since the early days of the Blues is called Bottleneck, or Slide guitar. The sound is achieved by sliding the cut off neck of a bottle up or down the strings. **Elmore James** was a master of this style. The Pedal Steel Guitar is another great slide instrument.

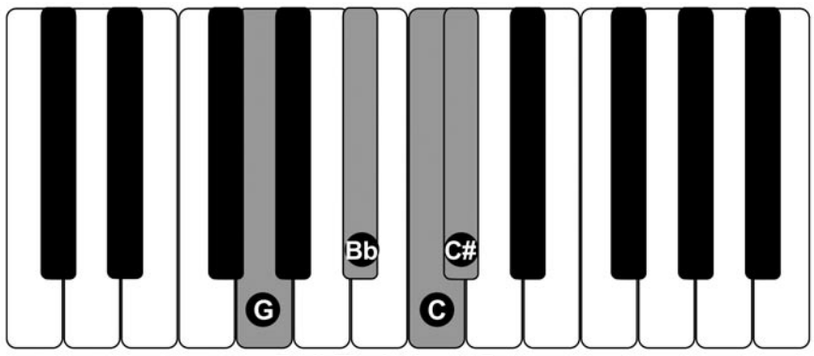
However, it's a little difficult to bend the notes of a piano like a guitar, so we have to use our fingers to play the grace notes very fast instead. These passing notes are not necessarily played as part of the scale, but just to get the feel of sliding up or down to the note you want to end the lick on. **Oscar Peterson**, **Ray Charles**, and **Otis Span** are all great examples of this technique.

If you're playing a blues in G, try rolling the C, C# onto the D and rolling the D and F, at the same time letting the low G ring through with the thumb.



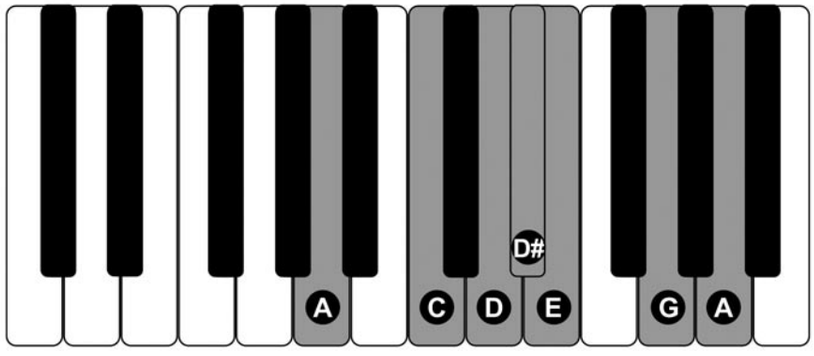
Roll Technique Up

On the way down you can slide from the C# onto the C, finishing on the Bb to G.



Roll Technique Down

If you play up the Am blues scale, you can slide quickly off D# with the third finger on to E.



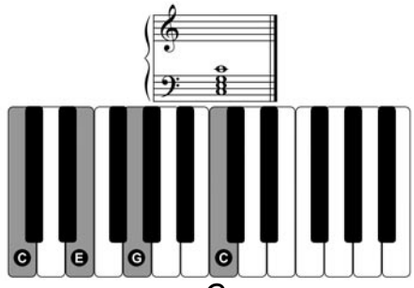
Am blues scale

On the way down you can slide off D# onto D and play C with your second finger. I usually also add a D with my second finger before the D# on the way up. Try rolling the fifth and seventh notes; you're basically playing a seven chord with this lick.

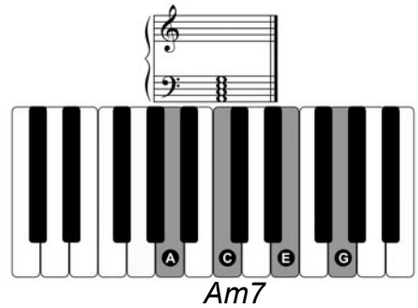
Of course, in some keys you can't slide off the notes you want. You have to play them instead, which takes up an extra finger and gives the key a subtly different feel to play in. Like in say Eb, where you have to play up to the 5th, a Bb

Another cool sequence is: 1, 6 minor, 2 minor, 5

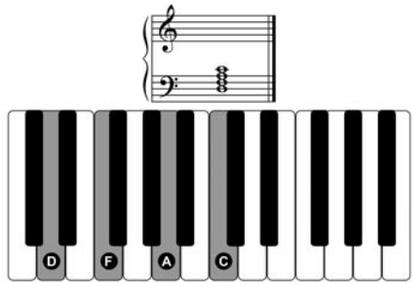
If you are in the key of C this would be the **1 chord C** (C, E, G & C), the **6 minor chord Am7** (A, C, E ,G), The **2 minor chord Dm7** (D, F, A & C) and **the 5 chord G7** (G, B, D, F)



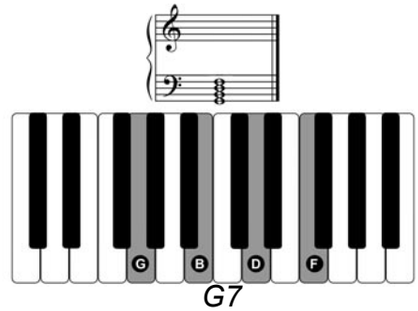
C



Am7



Dm7

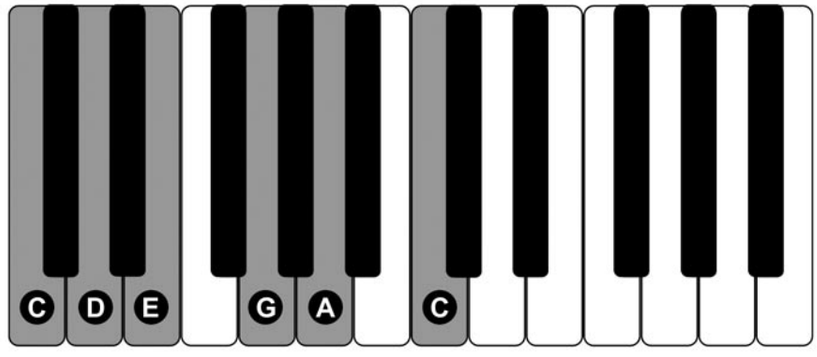


G7

Try one bar of 4/4 for each chord, sounding the chord on the first and third beat of each bar.

With your right hand you can play around with a **pentatonic scale** (we'll touch again on the Pentatonic scale later). In C it would be: **C, D, E, G, A, C**

You can also use D# as a passing note between the D and E, and G# between the G and the A. You can sometimes flat the third on the way down the scale.

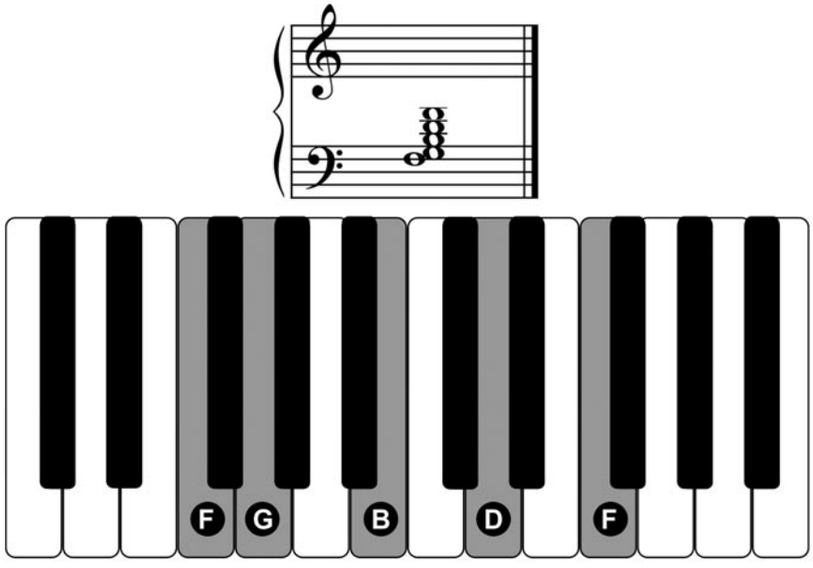


C Major Pentatonic Scale

Have fun playing these notes in any old order that sounds good to you with your right hand while you play the chord sequence with your left.

Later you can work on ways to play the seventh and other altered chord notes on the bottom of the chord instead of on the top. Like say **G7**, instead of only playing the flat seventh on the top, which in the key of G is the F note, try playing G7 this way.

Play F on the bottom with the thumb of your right hand. F, B, D, F Your thumb can also play the F and G together to make a richer sounding chord. With your left hand playing a low G note which roots the chord. Again, you can build other chords by counting up from the root note of the key you are in. The relationships between the notes are the same in all keys of course.



G7

"I have known Mr. Sears since his arrival in Northern California in the late '60s, and have had the good fortune to have shared many a stage as well as recording dates. Pete has an amazing command of a number of piano blues genres as well as a fine and ample knowledge of the bass guitar. He is the consummate musician, and a good friend to boot."
-**Jack Casady** *(Jefferson Airplane, Hot Tuna)*

Electric Hot Tuna. Further Festival 1996.
Photo by Robbi Cohn

“The man can play anything, and if he can’t he’ll clear his throat about five times and figure it out in five minutes. And then amazing.”
Grace Slick. *(Jefferson Airplane)*

Grace Slick, Pete Sears, Jefferson Starship, July 1976.
Central Park, NYC. 100,000 people.
Photo by Joel L. Holzman

John Cipollina and Pete Sears.
Photo by Greg Hitt

Walking Bass Notes:

Other than the **Jimmy Reed**/**Chuck Berry** riff, there are many different styles of left hand accompaniment. Walking the bass notes can be fun while playing the appropriate chords with your right hand. Walk the low piano notes around using the same scale and chords notes you are vamping on with your right hand.

Try it on a blues song. I also play the bass guitar, so I enjoy playing bass on the piano or a Hammond B3 organ. Check out **Jack McDuff's** bass lines on the B3. But for now, it's generally a good idea to stay away from piano bass lines if you are playing with a bass player in a band, especially if you're playing a Fender Rhodes electric piano. Being in the same range, your bass notes will often clash, so it's better to vamp on mid-range chords, playing occasional fills with your right hand if the music calls for it. Having played bass, keyboards and sometimes both, I am particularly sensitive to this problem; you would be surprised how many otherwise excellent keyboard players don't seem to get this concept. You can go nuts with both hands when it's your turn to take a keyboard solo.

The rest of the time you are one part of a whole. It can be an amazing, almost mystical experience when all the musicians in a band move together as one unit—when the musical light and shade is spontaneous and unrehearsed. After a band of musicians have played together for a while, it gets to a point where everyone instinctively recognizes through certain musical phrases and rhythmic cues where the music is going. This is especially the case during improvisational sections.

Of course, playing with a band can also be an extremely frustrating experience, and you can only hope you are not the source of frustration.

Another important factor that affects musicians onstage are the sound monitors. These aren't some sort of music police waiting in the wings to bash you if you make a mistake, but an amplified speaker system placed along the front of the stage and facing the musicians. Different instruments can be piped through the musician's individual monitor speaker at any level they choose. Sometimes it's just vocals, sometimes the player on the other side of the stage. I personally try to use them as little as possible these days as it can sometimes feels artificial, but there are times when there is no way around using them. To hear myself, I like to use a keyboard amp placed next to me so I can adjust my levels to the subtle (and not so subtle) changes in stage volume levels without having to gestulate frantically to the monitor mixer. I try to place my amp next to me so I don't contribute too strongly to the overall stage level, which can sometimes spiral out of control if you're not careful. It just takes one musician who starts believing the Rock God stories made up by his publicity agent, to turn up a bit. This usually results in the guy next to him not being able to hear himself, so he turns up, which soon spreads to the whole band—to the dismay of the poor front of house sound engineer who completely loses control of the mix due to excessive stage volume. Right Howard?

I feel a strong connection to an audience, and how they respond to the music. I don't consciously think about it, unless they're pelting the stage with tomatoes. I once saw that happen to a band I was sharing the bill with at a Knebworth Festival in England. They handled it well, didn't flinch the entire set. I had a similar experience when I played in a band that was pelted with firecrackers. But that's another story. The audience has a tremendous effect on a band. On a good night, they become part of the music—it becomes cyclical.

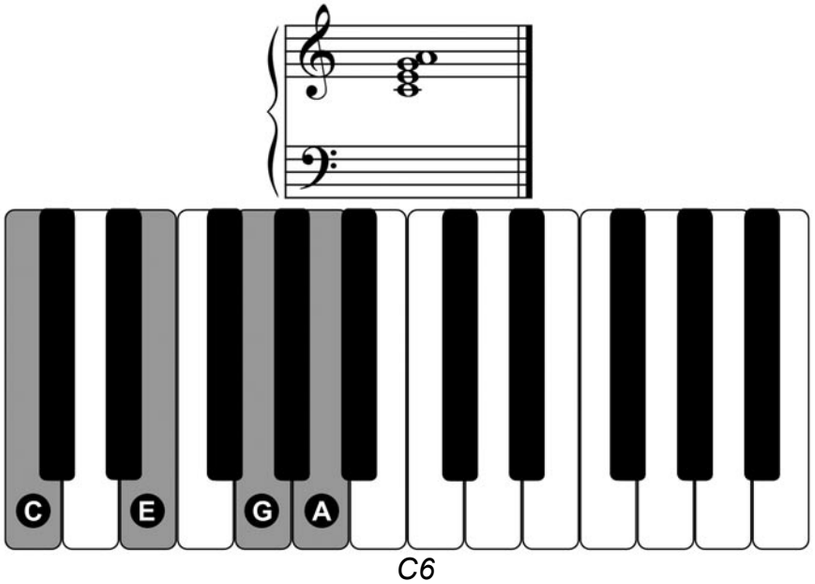
A band's musical energy feeds the audience, and they in turn feed the band, unless they are on the guest list. As I mentioned before, it's important that you take the time to work out some of these chords and riffs we are working on in other keys, using the Step Patterns and note relationships.

Jazz musicians usually like to spice up a song's basic chord sequence, by substituting different chords. These chords, although very different sounding, often still imply the melody line of the tune. Although these are more interesting sounding chords, you need to be careful not to sacrifice the essential essence and mood that simple chords can inspire in the listener. It depends on the genre of music. I suspect jazzed up oompah music just wouldn't make it. But it might, that's the beauty of using substitutions.

We've established that it's good to explore, and that there's no right or wrong. If you think you've hit a wrong note, carry on playing it and people may, if you're lucky, think you played it on purpose, just to be experimental. You can always tell when a musician hits a wrong note onstage because they usually play the following note really loud, or yell at their poor roadie like

Let’s try a few chord variations in the key of C. You can work them out with either hand.

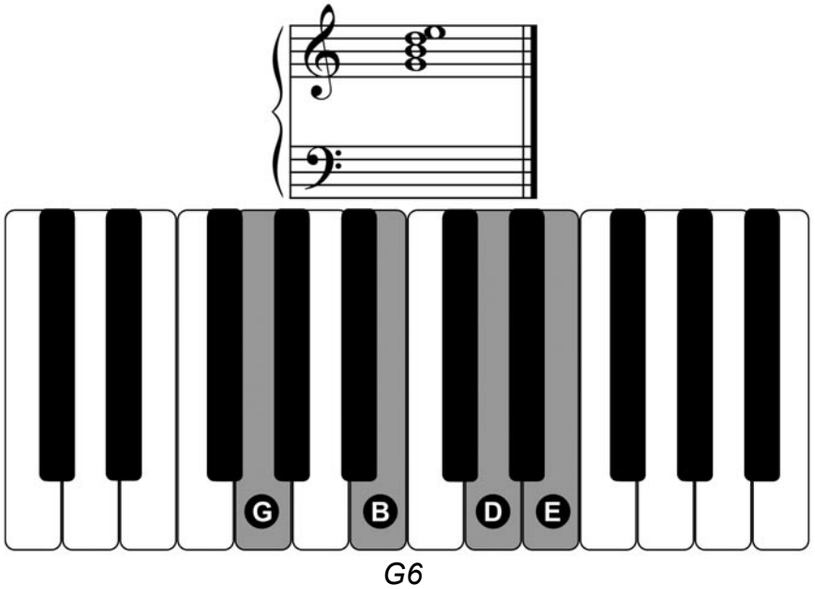
For C6, play the basic C chord, C, E, G, and add the sixth note of the C scale, an A.



C6

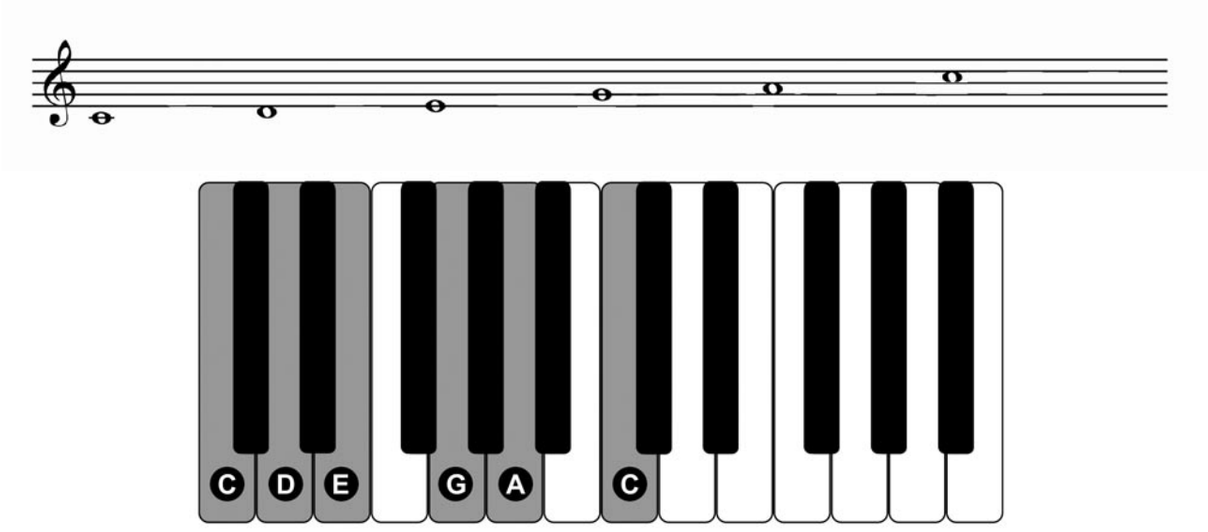
If you want to work out a 6 chord in another key, just count up six notes in the scale from the root and add that note to the basic three-note chord.

In G it would be an E that makes it into a six chord.



G6

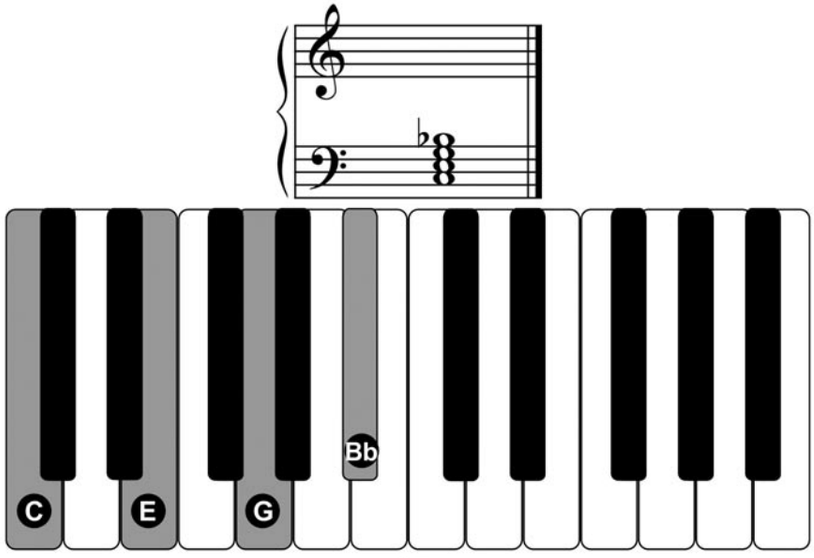
Try soloing to the C6 chord with your right hand using the notes of the C major pentatonic scale.
C, D, E, G, A, C



C Major Pentatonic Scale

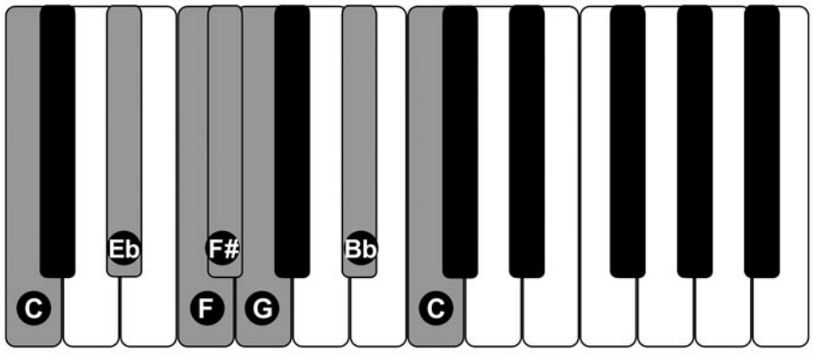
Play C6 with your left hand, and solo with your right.

For C7, flat the major seventh note B to Bb, so C7 would be C,E,G,Bb (a much bluesier sounding chord).



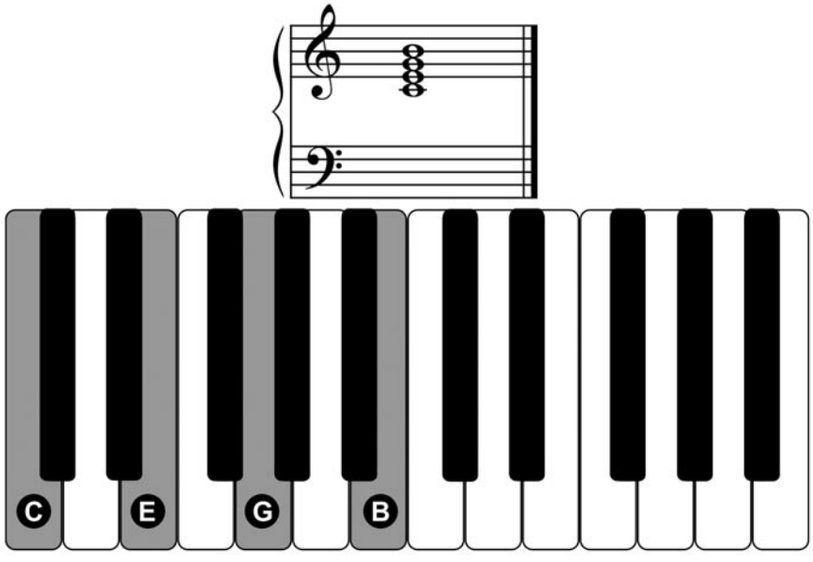
C7

Play the blues scale with seventh chords.



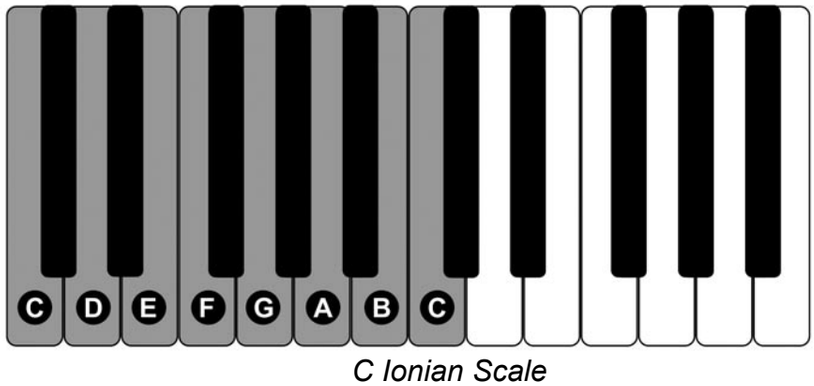
C blues Scale

For **Cmaj7** , add the seventh note in the C scale, B without flatting it, so Cmaj7 would be C, E, G, and B.



CMaj7

For soloing, try playing the **Ionian C scale** with the Cmajor7 chord.



C Ionian Scale

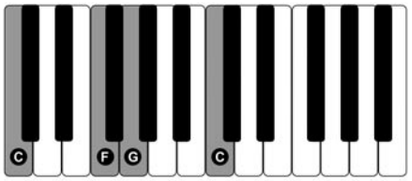
It's probably best to leave out the 4th note of the Cmajor scale, F, due to it's dissonant nature when played with a major seven. It certainly can be played—whatever sounds good to you in the context of the tune you are playing. The 4th can work nicely as a passing note.

Suspended and Augmented Chords

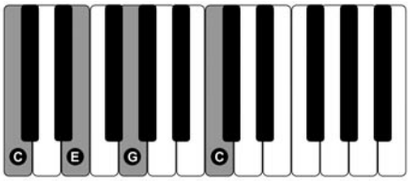
Suspended chords are often used to give the music a feeling that it needs to resolve into another chord.

For example, **Csus4** sets up and resolves nicely to a regular C major chord.

Play Csus4 into C major.



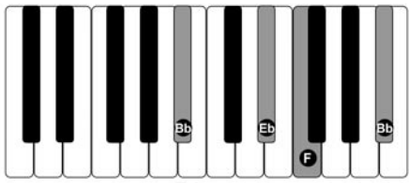
Csus4



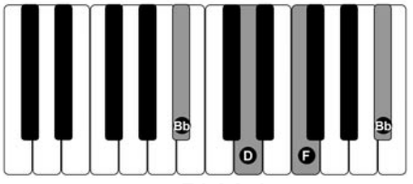
CMaj

Csus4 would be: **C, F, G,** and **C.** F is the sus 4 of C

If you were in the key of Bb, **Bbsus4** would be **Bb, Eb, F, Bb.** Eb being the fourth note in the Bb scale, is the sus 4 of Bb. This resolves nicely into a Bb.



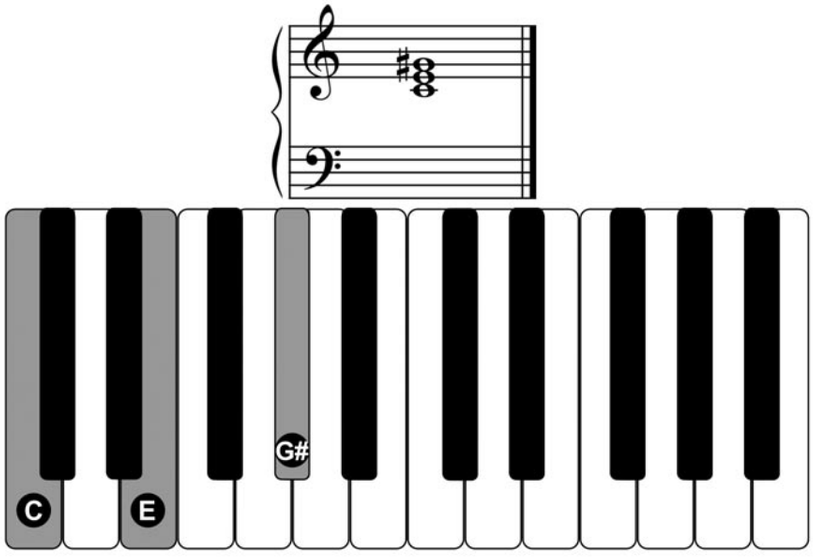
Bbsus4



BbMaj

Augmented Chords:

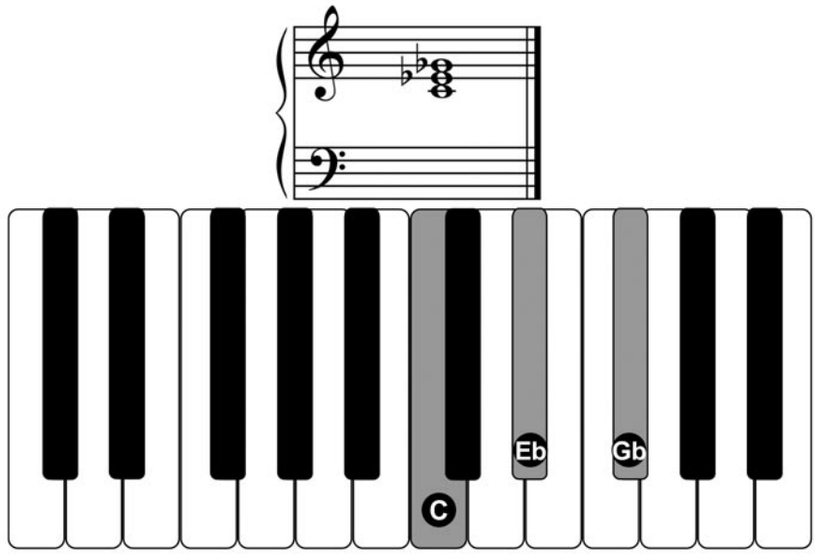
C augmented means you sharp the 5th (**C, E, G#**).



Augmented chords work nicely for a blues or gospel turnaround on the 5 chord.

If you were in G, and were at the end of a sequence, you could play D augmented for the turnaround.

We already talked about diminished chords, but here is **C diminished** again.



Cdim

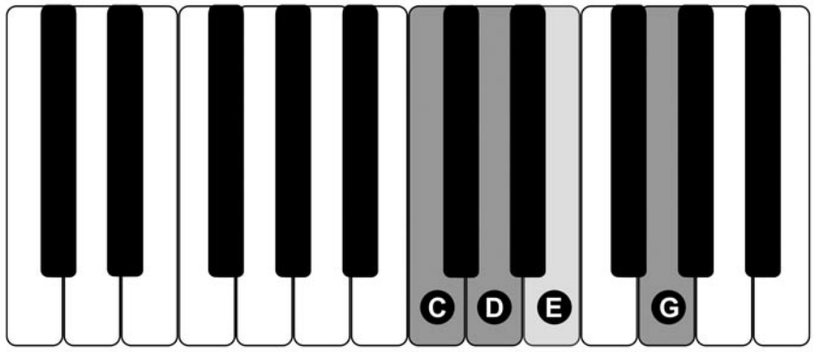
The diminished chord has a flat third and a flat fifth. So in the key of C it would be **C, Eb & Gb**.

Note Values:

As for quarter notes, and eighth note beat values, remember that if you split up the eighth notes you get sixteenth notes, and so on.

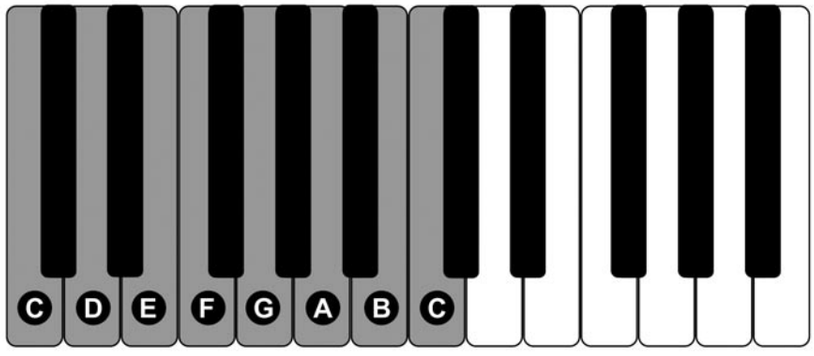
Musical notes and their beat values, can all be written down by placing their symbols on the corresponding staff lines. There are many books to help you learn to read and write music, which will enable you to play first class pieces of music written by other musicians. But if you have the time, the best way to learn to play the piano or write music, is to hire a good old-fashioned teacher to rap you over the knuckles with a ruler if you screw up.

Here's another useful style which crops up quite a bit and sounds great in any key: A, E, G, Eb, Bb etc. It's called a suspended 2 chord, or a sus 2, which in C would, of course, be the D note. In C you play the D with your 2nd finger at the same time as the fifth note G, which gives an unresolved feeling. Then play the E with your 3rd finger while still holding down the G, which gives a sense of resolution.



Csus2

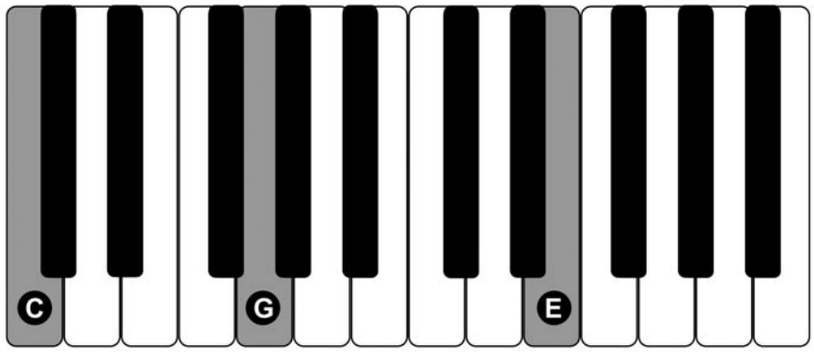
Improvise with the Ionian Scale in the key of C, sticking in the sus 2 chord whenever you feel like it.



C Ionian Scale

Sometimes, you can play the root note with the 5th finger and the octave with the thumb of your left hand as accompaniment.

It also sounds good if you play the root with your little finger and roll onto the 5th note (which if you are in the key of C would be G) with your 2nd finger, then roll your thumb up to the 10th which would be E.

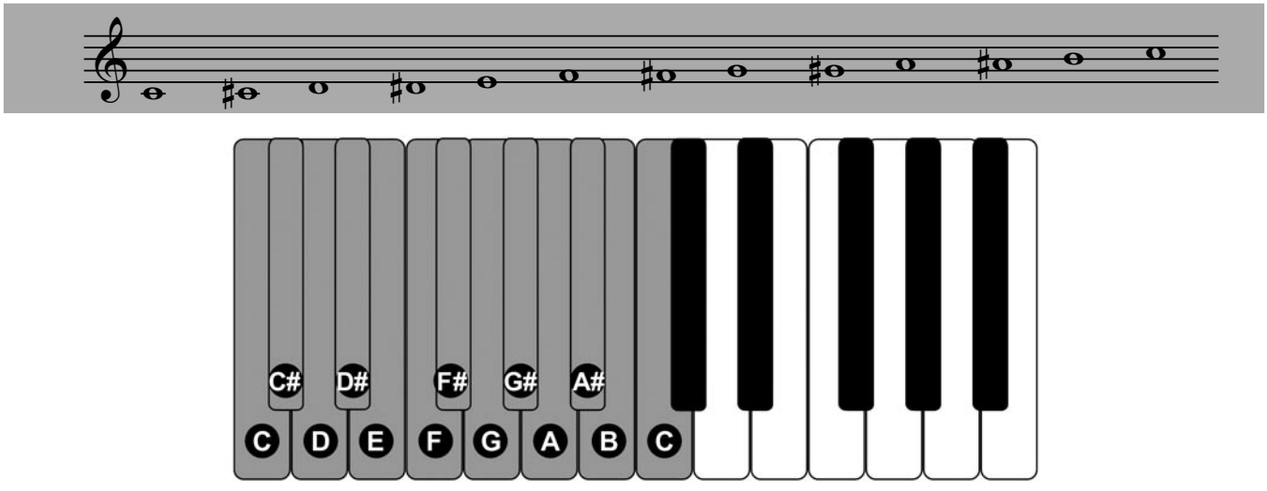


C10

You can use this same relationship when you go to the 4 chord also. If you are in C, this would of course be F.

Use the 1,4,5, chord relationship, but play around with the bar count and order. Just change chords when you feel like it. You can sometimes stick a 6 minor chord into the sequence. In C this would be an Am chord, or you could use a 2 minor, which in C would be Dm. An E minor sometimes sounds nice also.

Here's the chromatic scale reference again. It'll help you to pick keys to work out chords and scales using their corresponding step pattern and note intervals.

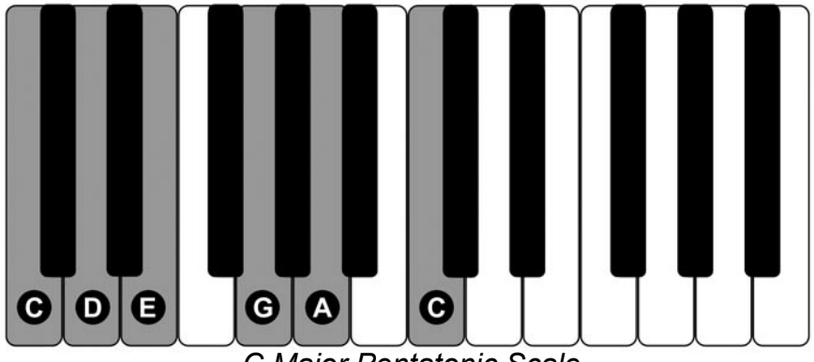


Chromatic Scale

Now I'd like to show you a major pentatonic scale. This is a commonly used scale to solo with. The step pattern for a major pentatonic scale in any key is:

WHOLE STEP, WHOLE STEP, WHOLE + HALF STEP, WHOLE STEP, WHOLE + HALF STEP

As usual, let's work it out in C. Here are the notes for the pentatonic scale in C major:



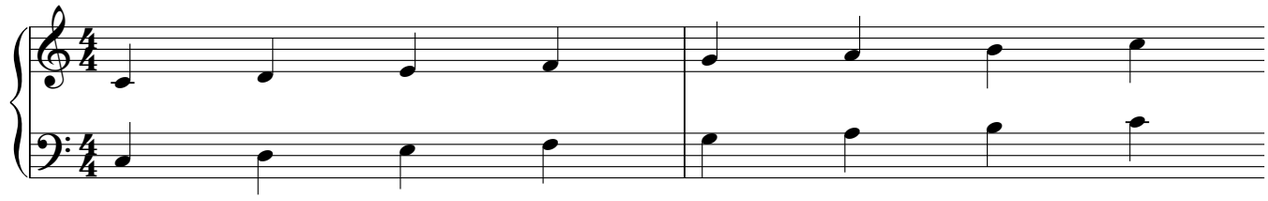
C Major Pentatonic Scale

That's C to D (whole step) D to E (whole step) E to G (whole step + a half step) G to A (whole step) and A to C (whole step + a half step). Using the whole step, half step pentatonic scale step pattern and their tonal relationships, try working out pentatonic scales in other keys.

Chordal Relationships

Other than playing by ear, you can learn which chords to use when writing a tune by learning how to harmonize a major scale. These are simple rules, although a lot of great music has been written using just a few of these chordal relationships. Later, you can break as many rules as you like, as long as it sounds good to you, and hopefully your audience.

There are many variations of these chords which are created by altering just one or two notes. Let's use the C major scale again.

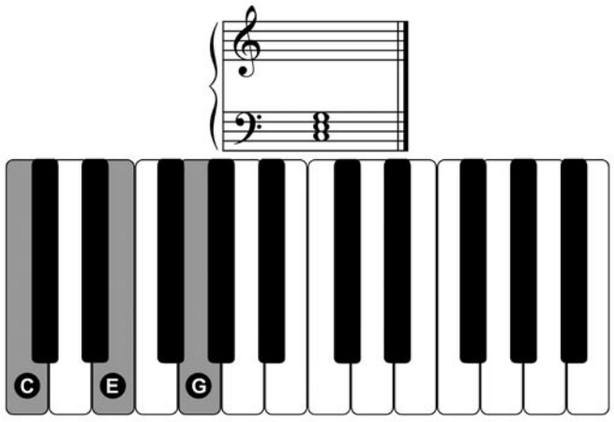


Notice the notes on the staff lines. In Piano music, these lines are usually broken up into two sections of five lines; an upper set and a lower set. The individual lines and the spaces in between correspond with the notes the composer wants the musician to play. The music also indicates note length, velocity and timbre. Time signatures and feel are also written in. The two sets of five stave lines have also been separated for ease of reading. There is a line in between the two sets of five that has been taken out to provide better orientation for the reader. Short versions of this line are written in as needed. The missing line represents middle C on the piano. Middle C has a short line running through it representing the missing line. The notes above and below middle C are D and B.

The top five lines are called the Treble Clef and generally represent notes played by the right hand. The bottom five lines are called the bass clef and usually indicate notes played by the left hand. However, your hands are sometimes required to crossover. As you can see, Middle C shows up twice, once in the bass clef, and once in the treble clef. Again, they're separated for ease of reading, but they are the same note.

To learn how to harmonize a major scale into chords we will only concern ourselves with the treble clef. Play each note of the C major scale, which you should be pretty familiar with by now.

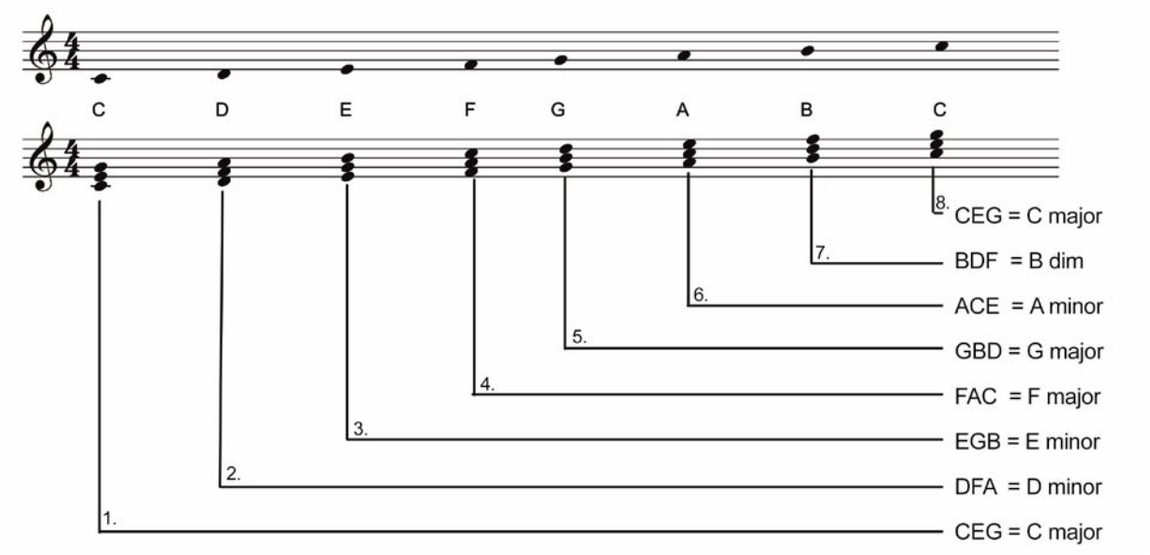
As you already know, to form a chord you take the root note of the scale, in this case C, add the third note of the scale E, and the fifth note G. This gives you a three-note triad, the minimum notes required to create a chord.



C Major Chord

You then repeat this pattern for each note in the scale, which provides a group of chords built on each note only using the notes from the scale.

So the diagram shows you the “Harmonized C major Scale” written in musical notation.



The resulting chords are: C major, D minor, E minor, F major, G major, A minor, B diminished and C major (an octave higher).

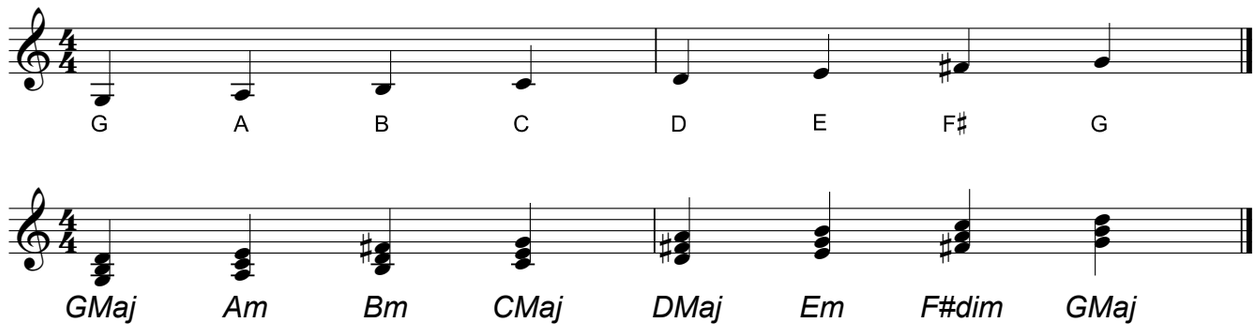
So you could say any combination of these chords is in the key of C major, and should sound good when played in any order. Again, this will hopefully be helpful when attempting to write your own music in different keys.

So this will work in any major key if you use these rules:

Start on the root note of the key and play up the scale with the chord shapes instead of just individual notes.

Remember that you have to keep the correct step pattern Intervals for the major, minor, diminished chords; they are the same regardless of the key you are in.

If you try it in G major, using the G major scale step pattern, which includes F# for the seventh note: you get G major, A minor, B minor, C major, D major, E minor and F# diminished. If you wanted to work out a song in the key of G, it may help you to know that the song probably uses some of these chords in the sequence.

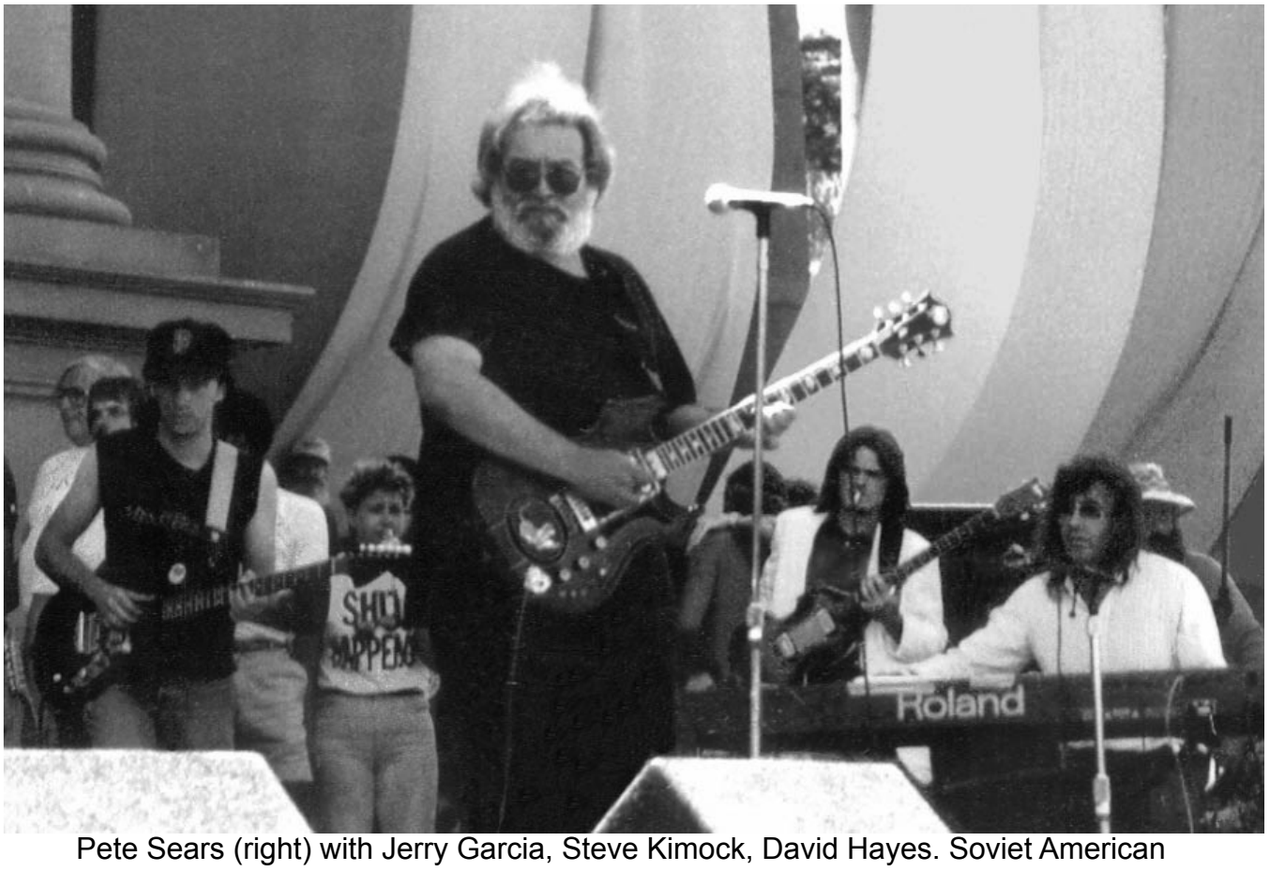


Later on you can start experimenting with harmonizing a major scale to four notes instead of just three. This can plunge you into the treacherous, but exciting border regions of Jazz.

You can also try harmonizing different types of scales to see what kind of chords you end up with. Above all, just have fun with it.

"Pete is a consummate musician and master of the ivories, able to play anything from beautiful, tender and timeless heart rendering passages, to rollicking rock and roll and blues, always keeping his ears open and reacting to the other players."

Barry Sless *(Phil Lesh & Friends, David Nelson Band, Kingfish)*



Pete Sears (right) with Jerry Garcia, Steve Kimock, David Hayes. Soviet American Peacewalk concert, July 16, 1988. Golden Gate Park, San Francisco.
Pete procured and organized all the musicians for this event.

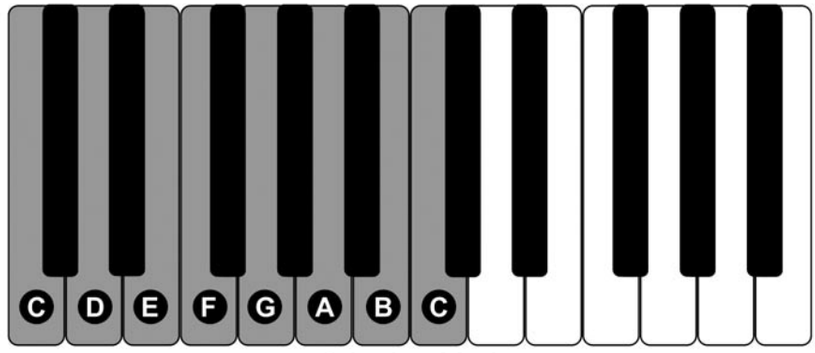
MODES:

This method, which we built from the key of C, is also useful in exploring different scale modes to solo with. The step pattern intervals used to find these scales will apply to any key.

Remember, it's all about the step pattern intervals between the notes, regardless of whether the notes are black or white. Most of the scales used by musicians to improvise solos with have special names.

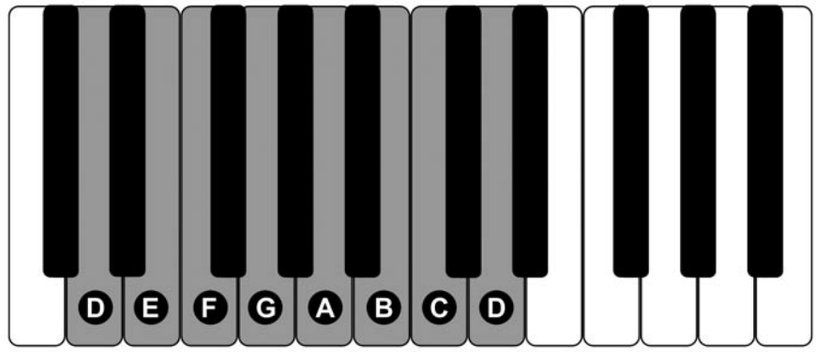
Modes	
Ionian	**Mixolydian**
Dorian	**Aeolian**
Phrygian	**Locrian**
Lydian	**Pentatonic**

They all provide their own unique color to the music you are playing. So, when you play the notes of any standard major scale you are in the Ionian mode.



C Ionian Mode

I mentioned the Dorian mode earlier. If you take the second note of any major scale and play the notes of the major scale on up, ending on the same note an octave higher, eight notes, you have created a scale in the Dorian Mode, D, E, F, G, A, B, C, D.

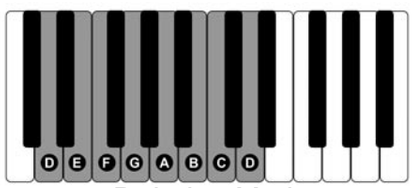


D dorian Mode

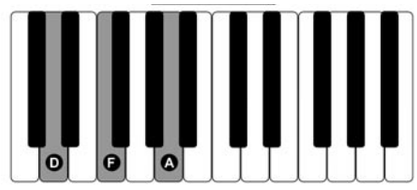
Dorian Mode Step pattern: (Whole) (Half) (Whole) (Whole) (Whole) (Half) (Whole)

This can open up your playing options quite a bit. If you are in the key of C major, the second note in the scale is D. Start on D and play on up the C scale to the next D note, an octave higher and you've played the D minor Dorian Scale.

Although you have only played the notes of, in this case the C major scale, the D note becomes the tonal center of the new Dorian scale. You end up with a nice selection of notes to solo with. Try playing a Dm chord and solo with the Dorian scale.



D dorian Mode

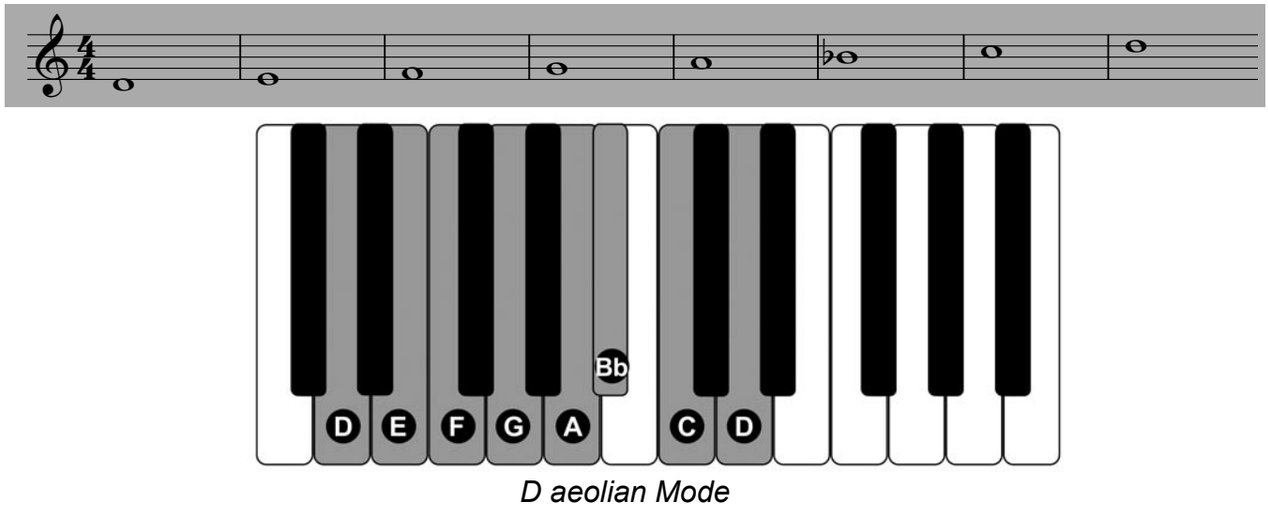


Dm

The Dorian Mode is often used by guitarists like **Carlos Santana**; he also mixes it up with the blues scale. **Harvey Mandel** is another example. Or in Jazz, **Miles Davis**.

Play the major scale in any key and try working out other Dorian scales. Remember to make the second note in the scale the tonal center and play on up the rest of the major scale to the same note an octave higher (eight notes) which puts you in the minor sounding Dorian mode. Use the Dorian mode step pattern.

You'll see that the natural minor scale Dm, which is the Aeolian scale, is a little different from the D Dorian minor scale. But only by one note.



D aeolian Mode

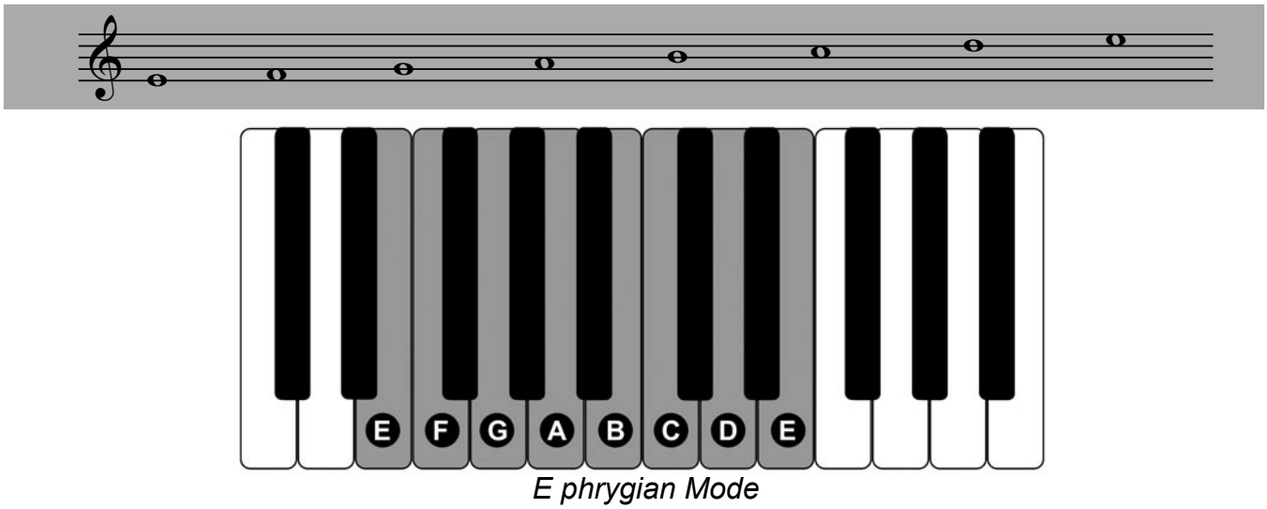
Bb (the flat sixth) is played in the natural minor, or Aeolian scale, and B (the major sixth) is played instead in the D Dorian scale. You can hear that one note can create a subtly different feel to the scale.

So the important notes in the Dorian mode are the root, which gives the scale the identity or tonal center, the third, which creates its minor character, and the major sixth, which makes it the Dorian scale, distinguishing it from the Aeolian natural minor scale.

Phrygian Mode:

We've worked on the Ionian and Dorian modes. Now let's carry on up the C major scale to the next note, E which is the third. We will use E as the new root or tonal center to form another scale or mode you can solo with.

Starting on E, carry on up using only the notes in the major scale until we get to the E an octave higher. This scale puts you in the Phrygian Mode, a scale often used in Flamenco, one of my favorite styles of music.

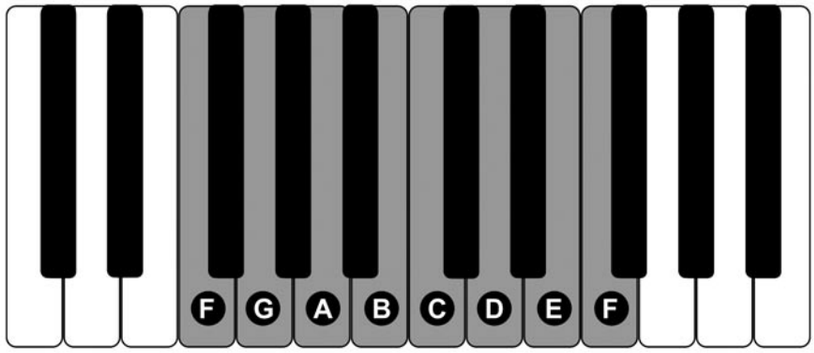


E phrygian Mode

Although the scale is a minor sounding scale in itself, it sounds weaker when played over an E minor chord and much stronger when played to an E major. Play the Phrygian mode to an E major and F sequence and you'll see what I mean.

Lydian Mode:

Play the C major scale until you come to the 4th note, F. Use F as the new root and tonal center, and play up an octave to the next F. By using only the notes in the C major scale, you are in the Lydian Mode. The Lydian mode is a major scale as it has a major third.



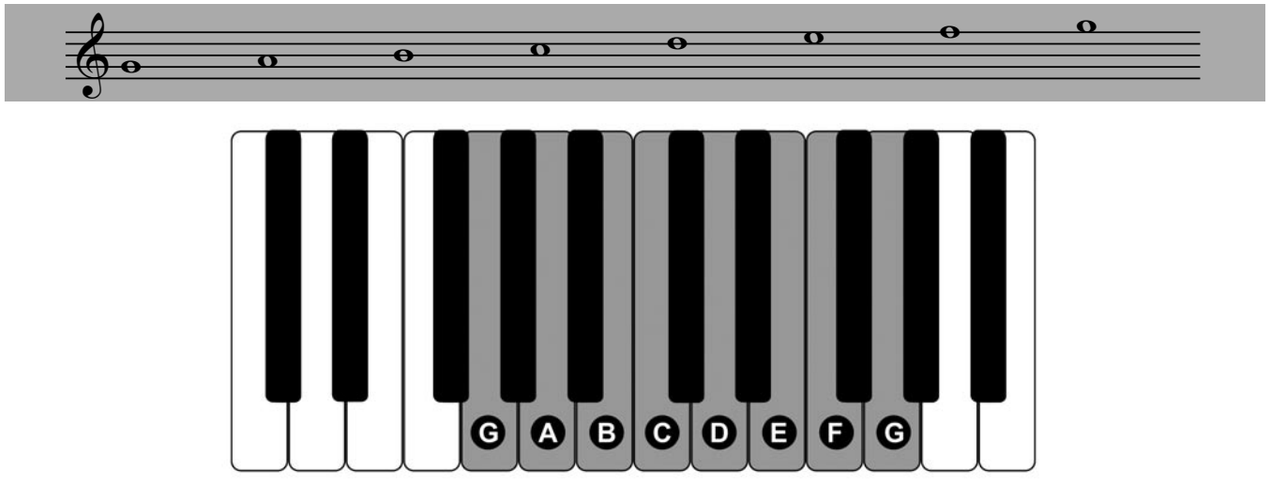
F Lydian Mode

Mixolydian Mode:

If you move up to the next note G, which is actually the tonal center and stabilizing tone of the C major scale and is the fifth note up .

Now play up an octave from G, using only notes from the C major scale, this gives you the Mixolydian Mode which is also a major scale as it has a major third.

The **Mixolydian scale** is: **G, A, B, C, D, E, F, G**



G Mixolydian Mode

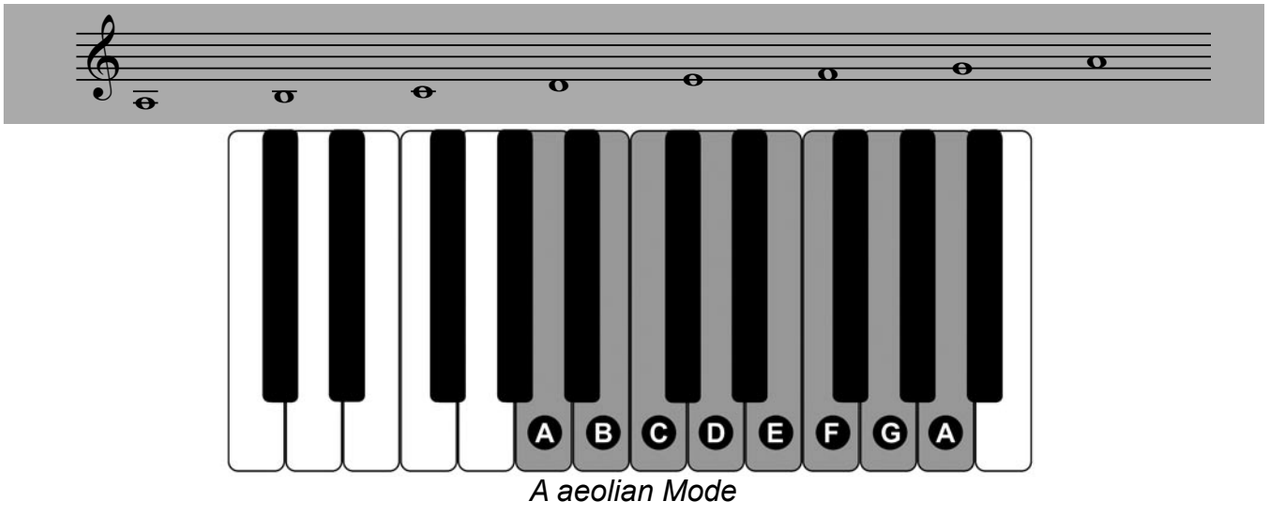
This is a popular scale to solo with.

Aeolian Mode:

Another popular scale to solo with is the Aeolian mode, which we touched on earlier. The note one step up from G in the C scale is A, the sixth note. So we can build the next selection of notes by using A as the tonal center.

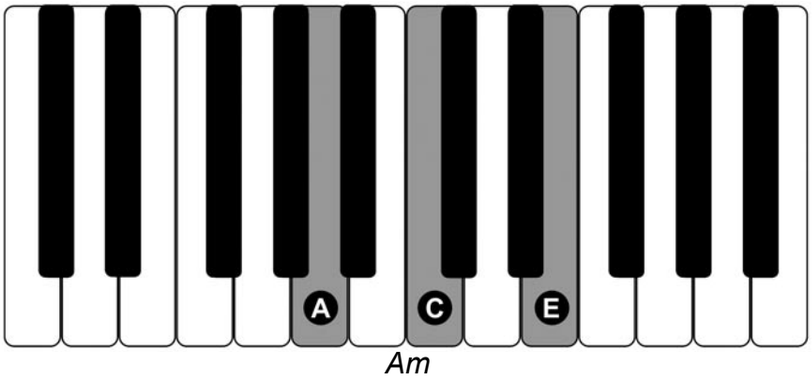
This scale is called the natural minor, or Aeolian Mode and uses the same notes as it's relative major scale, in this case C, but starts and ends on a different place on the scale's note ladder.

Start by playing A, then carry on up the C major scale, past C, until you end up on A again, so you get: **A, B, C, D, E, F, G, A**. This is called the natural minor, or Aeolian Mode.



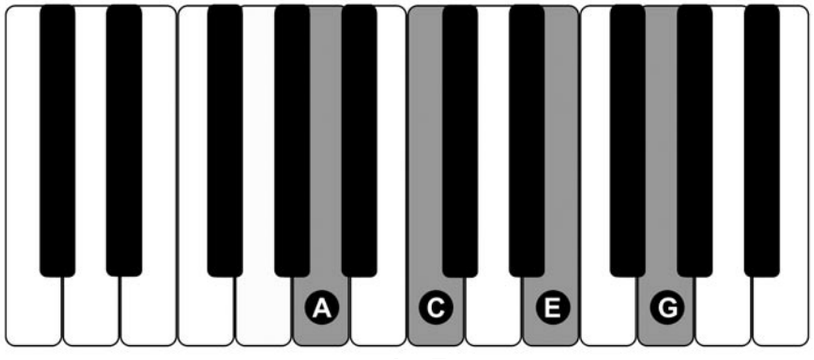
A aeolian Mode

Try improvising this scale over an A minor chord.



Am

Try playing the octave with your thumb and moving it down to the seventh occasionally.



Am7

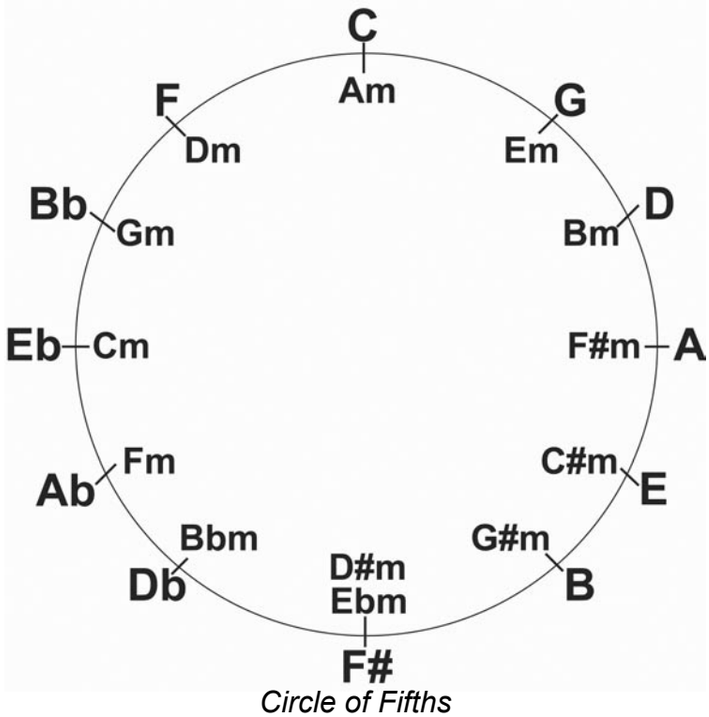
Relative Minors:

A minor is the relative minor of C major. All twelve keys have their own relative minor.

You can find the key's relative minor by either counting up six notes from the root note of the scale, or counting down three half steps, or semi-tones from the root note. Either way puts you on the sixth note of the major scale you are playing. Using only the notes in the major scale you then carry on up to the same note an octave higher, which creates a minor Aeolian scale. Or just build a minor chord from the sixth note. So again, the relative minor of C major is A minor.

The relative minor of G would be E minor. As I mentioned before, you could also find it by counting down three half steps, in this case from G to Em. Just like we counted three half steps from C to Am.

Here is a circle of fifths chart that shows keys and their relative minors.



Circle of Fifths

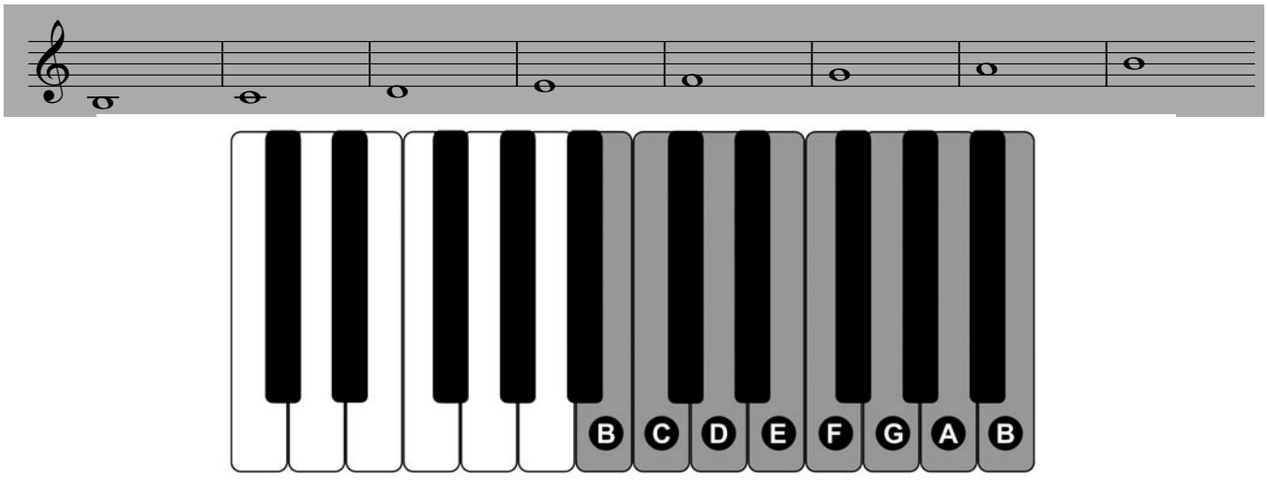
Remember that in all keys, the sixth note in it's major scale will give you the major chords relative minor.

It's important to remember that all the note intervals and step patterns we've used to work out scales, modes, and chords apply to all twelve keys. You can use the Circle of fifths to work your way through all the keys.

Practice something in say, C, for a while. Then move to the fifth and practice in G. Then a fifth up to D, and practice there, then up to A. You will eventually wind up playing in all keys, white notes and black.

Locrian Mode:

We finally end on the seventh note in the C major scale B. By using B as the new root or tonal center, and playing up the scale to B an octave higher, we find ourselves in the Locrian Mode. The Locrian Mode is not really used for soloing that often, probably because it doesn't have a perfect fifth and is considered unstable, containing a diminished fifth instead.



B Locrian Mode

As I mentioned before, you'll find yourself using the Dorian, Mixolydian and Aeolian modes quite a bit when soloing.

Remember, you take each note of a major scale and regard that note as the tonal center of the new mode. Here's a diagram of what we get when we use the C Ionian major scale:

C, D, E, F, G, A, B, C = C Ionian mode

D, E, F, G, A, B, C, D = D dorian mode

E, F, G, A, B, C, D, E = E Phrygian mode

F, G, A, B, C, D, E, F = F Lydian mode

G, A, B, C, D, E, F, G = G mixolydian mode

A, B, C, D, E, F, G, A = A aeolian mode

Work on becoming comfortable and familiar with the different scales, and experiment, creating melodies with your right hand while playing chords with your left. Try putting on some of your favorite CD's and working out melody lines and piano riffs.

At first it may feel awkward and somewhat difficult trying to learn new things, especially when you're attempting to play with both hands at the same time. Even though the racket you make will probably drive everyone else in the house completely insane, stick at it and try to push on through until your hands ache and you can't play another note.

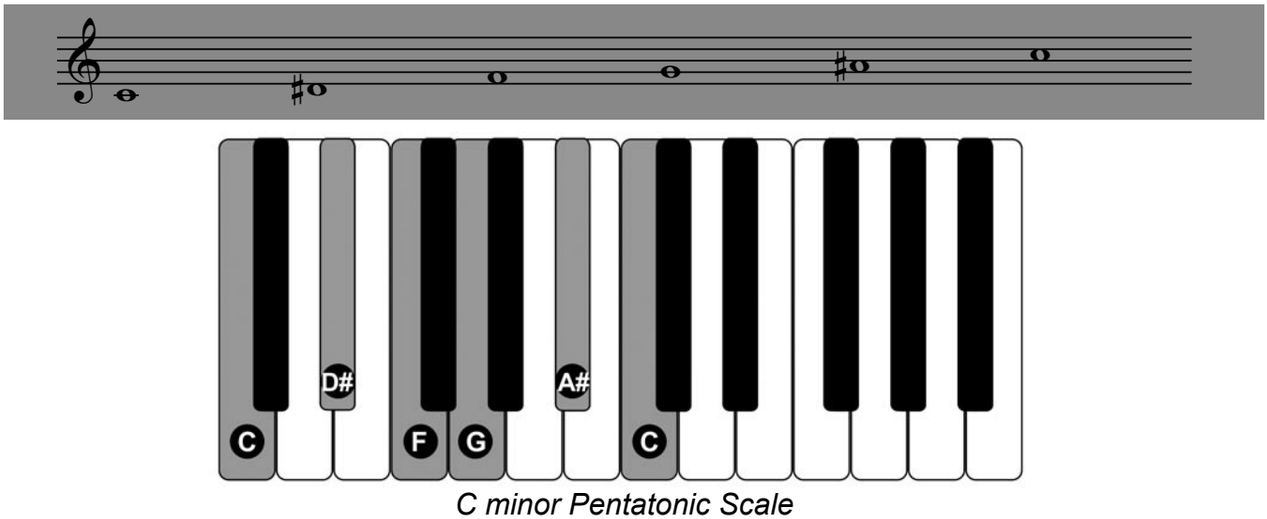
Some may frown at this idea and say you should stop playing before you begin to feel fatigue, but it seems to work for me when I'm working on something new and technically demanding. After practicing something over and over, obviously it will seem a little easier the next time you sit down and try to play it, and pushing those finger muscles to the threshold of pain seems to help. Eventually it will become second nature as you train those parts of your brain.

Minor Pentatonic Scales:

The step pattern for a minor pentatonic scale in any key is:

WHOLE STEP + HALF STEP, WHOLE STEP, WHOLE STEP, WHOLE STEP + HALF STEP, WHOLE STEP

Which in the key of C makes it: **C, D#, F, G, A#, C**



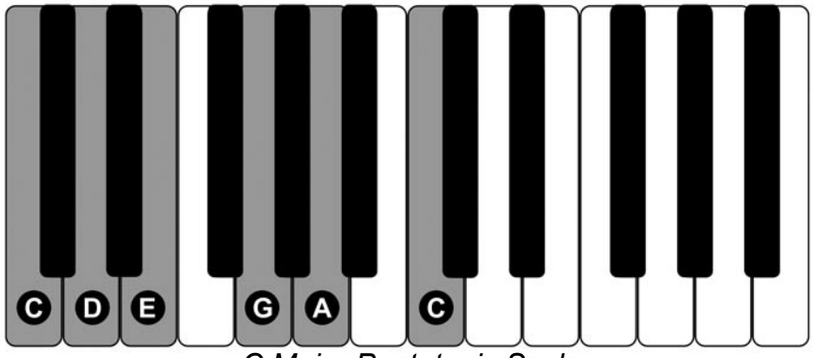
C minor Pentatonic Scale

Again, these step pattern interval relationships apply to the pentatonic minor scale in all twelve keys.

Once more, here is the step pattern for a major pentatonic scale in any key.

WHOLE STEP, WHOLE STEP, WHOLE + HALF STEP, WHOLE STEP, WHOLE + HALF STEP

Here are the notes again for the pentatonic scale in C major:



C Major Pentatonic Scale

You can experiment with the five note Pentatonic scale, and open up all sorts of soloing possibilities. You can also give yourself more chord choices by adding one or more notes to a regular pentatonic scale.

"Pete Sears' keyboard style is a wonderful blend of Boogie Woogie, Blues, Rock and Roll, and a touch of that special sound that only experience can bring. If you're traveling the 88's you won't find a better navigator than Pete Sears."
***GE Smith** (Bob Dylan, Saturday Night Live Band Leader, Hall & Oats)*

Flying Other Brothers with Bob Weir, Warren Haynes.
Spencer Dryden Benefit, May 22, 2004.
Photo by bob Minkin.

Playing In a Band:

At some point you might want to have a go at playing with a band. It can be a very cool thing, like no other. I've had some almost transcendental experiences playing music with other musicians.

Sam Gopal Dream, (Original band) (LtoR) Pete Sears, Sam Gopal, Mick Hutchinson. London,1967.
Photo by Clay Perry.

My years on bass and keyboards with Tabla player, **Sam Gopal**, and guitarist **Mick Hutchinson,** during the 1960's comes to mind, especially when **Jimi Hendrix** sat in with us during a particularly insane evening at a London nightclub. My years on keyboards with **Jorma Kaukonen** during the 90's also stand out to me, as do working with **Rod Stewart** and **Ron Wood** on "**Every Picture Tells a Story**". We definitely hit some peaks with **Jefferson Starship** in the 70's when **Papa John Creach** played with us on fiddle. I have other special memories of my time with **John Cipollina**, as well as the **SKB band** and, of course, sitting in and recording with the great **John Lee Hooker**. I'm currently having a great time playing with "Moonalice".

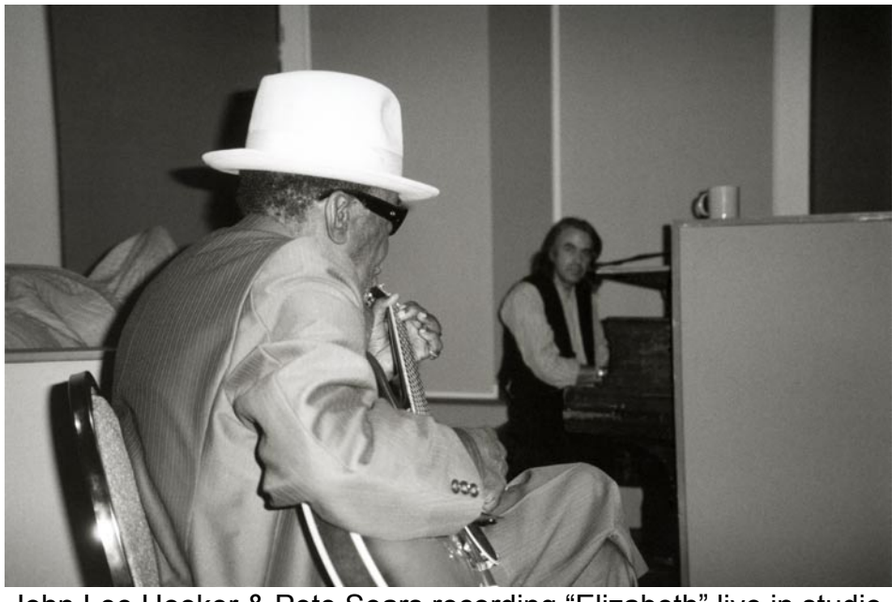
Earlier, I talked about staying away from left hand piano bass lines when working with bass players. But it can actually work really well when the piano player and bass player are in sync and playing exactly the same notes. Early Rock & R&B often used this technique, especially with an upright bass player.

You can always add bass notes with your left hand during your solo, if it fits. Of course you can play whatever the heck you want during your solo, and the band will (should at least) be instinctually moving with you, however rocky a path you take on your musical journey. Also try to be conscious of laying back in the groove with the drummer and not rushing when playing a supporting role, although it's okay to push a bit when soloing. A good drummer will hold it back, which can give your solo a nice edge. **Moe Denham**, the Hammond B3 player, touches on this in the book "**Beauty In The B**". But if you are rushing the beat when playing a rhythmic role, watch out for flying drumsticks. I was in a band once where the lead singer was pierced in the head by a flying drumstick in the middle of a song. Not that he was rushing his vocals; I think it was probably more of an unconscious personal thing. Not a pretty site though. But don't think about flying drumsticks when soloing; just move where your improvised solo takes you and go for it.

As I mentioned earlier, a good band will instinctually sense where the soloist is going and move with them. Although soloing is a great way to express yourself, remember that playing a supportive role can be equally as satisfying.

A few observations about music in general.

Be careful not to overplay, especially in a band situation. Try to use the subtleties of light and shade in your music. Let the music and melody breath, and only play fast complex runs when they will really mean something in the context of the piece you are playing. Otherwise you run the risk of mesmerizing your audience and leaving them numb and shell-shocked from a relentless onslaught of notes.



John Lee Hooker & Pete Sears recording “Elizabeth” live in studio. Bayview Studios, Richmond, California. January 14th, 1998.

I’ve seen musicians work very hard to develop their technique, only to mess it all up by playing a million notes a minute from start to finish, like it’s some sort of race. If you’re not careful, this can leave an audience completely flat emotionally. I’ve seen a master like **John Lee Hooker** play one simple blues riff for ten minutes and move an audience to tears. Of course, musicians like **Oscar Peterson** or **Herbie Hancock** have tremendous technique, but they also know how and when to use it so it really means something. Musicians like this seem to instinctually understand the need for melody. The music can be completely out on the edge, but skillful use of melody and space can give the listener, and the musician something to grab hold of. So when you do play some fast complex runs, they really mean something to the audience, and will lift the music to another level.

For masters of melody and inventiveness check out **Miles Davis, Booker T, Steve Kimock, T-Bone Burnett, Bill Evans**, a piece of **Chopin**, **Willie Nelson** or an old **Robert Johnson** recording. **Johnny Cash** had an instinctual sense of what should go where in his music—they are all masters in their own right. Guitarist **Rich Kirch,** from **John Lee Hooker’s Coast to Coast Blues Band** was present when **Miles Davis** complemented John Lee on his music. These were two very different, soulful players, who lived music and life on their own terms, but had respect for each other’s musical space.

For further study, you will benefit greatly from the one on one interaction of working with a good music teacher. If you prefer to work at home, there are many videos and books available to guide you. I sometimes teach keys at my old band mate, **Jorma Kaukonen's "Fur Peace Ranch Guitar Camp"** in south eastern Ohio. It's an adult camp that is primarily a guitar-oriented program, but we find piano occasionally fits nicely into the curriculum.

You'll gradually develop your own musical style and attitude as your playing progresses. You don't really want to sound like anybody else anyway; your keyboard heroes already have their corners buttoned up, so try to go with your own instincts. It, of course, doesn't hurt to work out your hero's favorite chord progressions and method of soloing, but you will never play their music as good as they do. Even if you learn to play their tunes note for note with impeccable technique, they own their style. Make your music your own and gain that edge of originality that will give your playing that little extra feel listeners seem to pick up on.

If you feel yourself wandering off the beaten path a bit, go for it, even if it means occasionaly screwing up here and there. Push the envelope, be bold in your playing, and don't be afraid to live a little dangerously. Above all, have fun with it and don't be afraid of the keyboard.

Technique is very helpful in giving you choices to draw on in your improvisational playing; it'll certainly help you sound impressive when you play. However, there is an essential element that can't be broken down into scales, chords, or music notation, and that's feeling, what's commonly referred to as soul. This is, of course, difficult to teach, but try to become one with the music, and try to feel each note you play as an extension of your spirit and emotions.

As I mentioned before, musical rules are important in helping you express yourself, and in understanding why things work, but it's really your personal perspective that will ultimately instill originality and feel in your music.

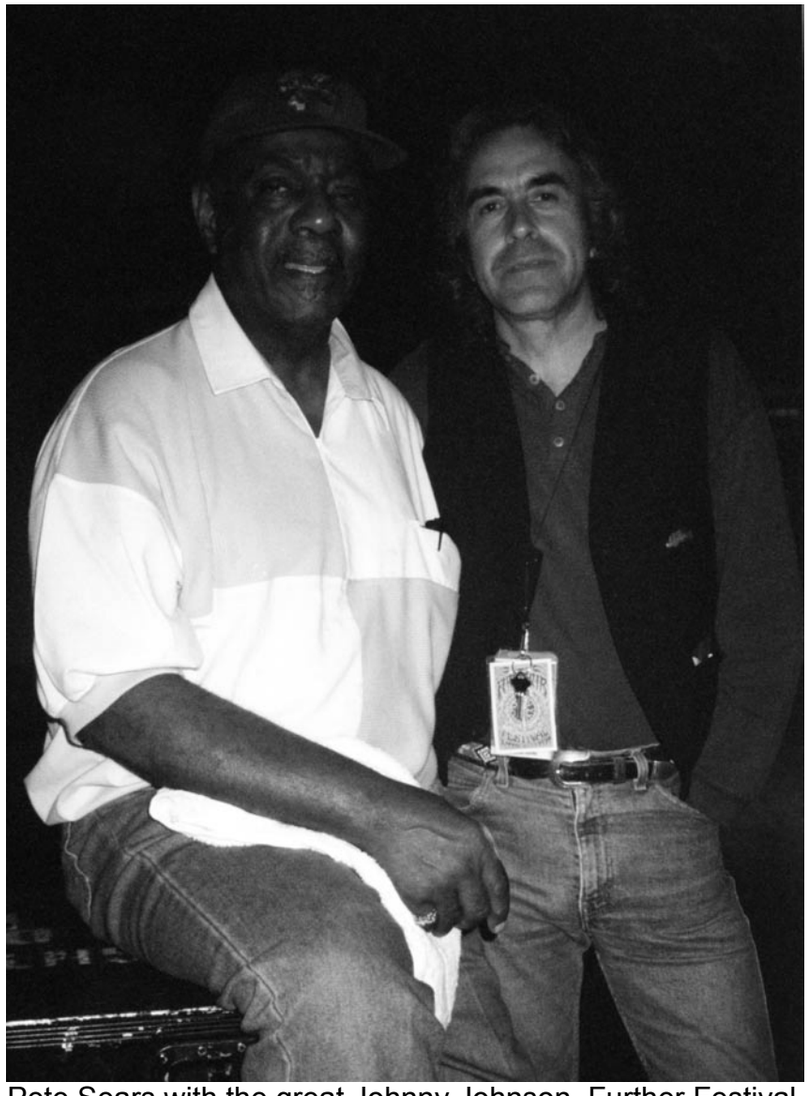
And finally, I feel it's important to keep an open mind and to try to listen to other people's music from a global perspective. There are many distinct folk based musical traditions from around the world. When you incorporate some of these traditions into your playing, it can give you a wealth of interesting scales and possibilities to spice up your music, especially if you're willing to open your mind and attempt to understand some of the beliefs and historical perspective of the cultures they grew from. Many instruments such as the Indian Sitar, the fretless Arabic Ud, the Chinese Erhu, and the Japanese Shamisen, slide across and between the notes and tones to wrench out every bit of emotion possible.

Western music is based on an equal-tempered system that divides the octaves into twelve equal semi-tones. But some fretless Western instruments that are not bound by fixed pitch relationships, such as the Cello and Violin, often draw on very subtle variations in pitch. Listen to a string quartet, or a gypsy violinist, to hear the tremendous passion and emotion fretless instruments can evoke.

Traditional African music, Indian, Celtic, Greek, and all folk based music across the planet, seem to share a common thread of humanity that somehow transcend cultural boundaries, fear, ignorance and distrust. Instruments like the Aboriginal didgeridoo, when played well at least, seem to evoke a sense of antiquity and the mystery of life by playing subtle breath rhythms with one deep, hypnotic tone that reverberates into the deepest recesses of our souls.

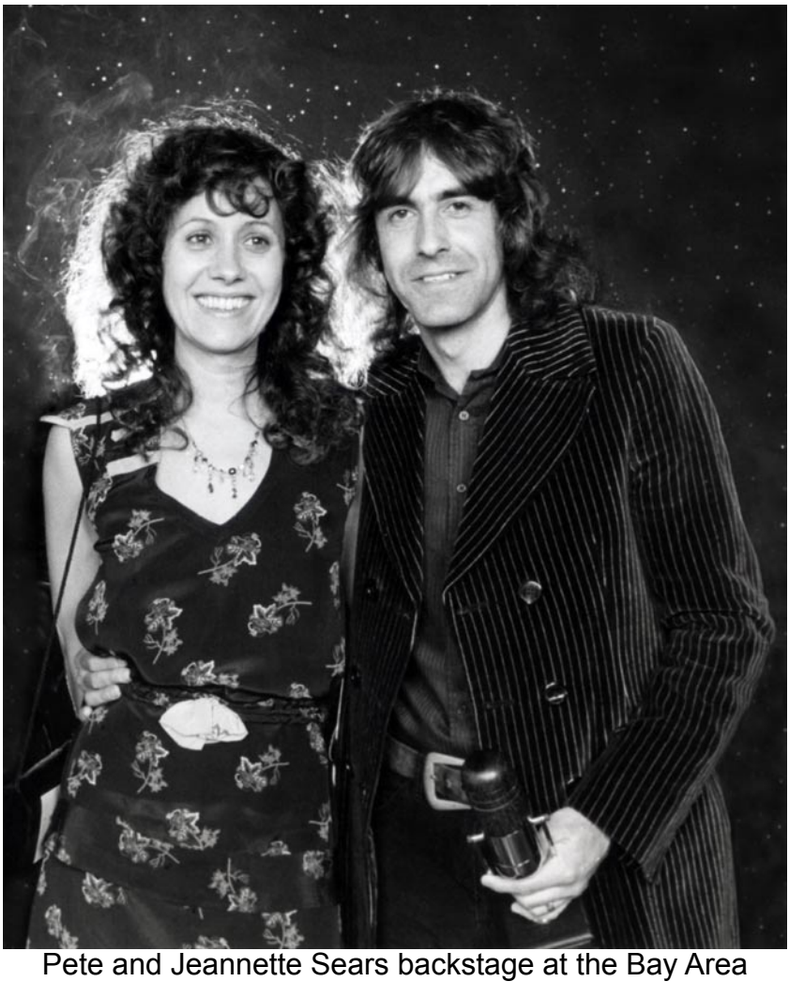
So, you can study any part of this book/DVD at any time. Just keep whittling away at it and you will discover who you are as a musician, and what kinds of music you enjoy playing.

As I said before, there are a wealth of musical traditions out there to be listened to or researched. These can help influence your own musical boundaries, and the world of music will be that much richer for your own contributions. Even if only one person listens to the sounds you generate on your instrument, and that person is you, you have added to the collective unconscious of the universal language and spirit of music—vibrations of sound that can help break down the cultural boundaries of fear and intolerance, promote healing and help inspire a common ground for all peoples. Well, I hope this Book has been of some use to you. Remember the satisfaction is in the journey.

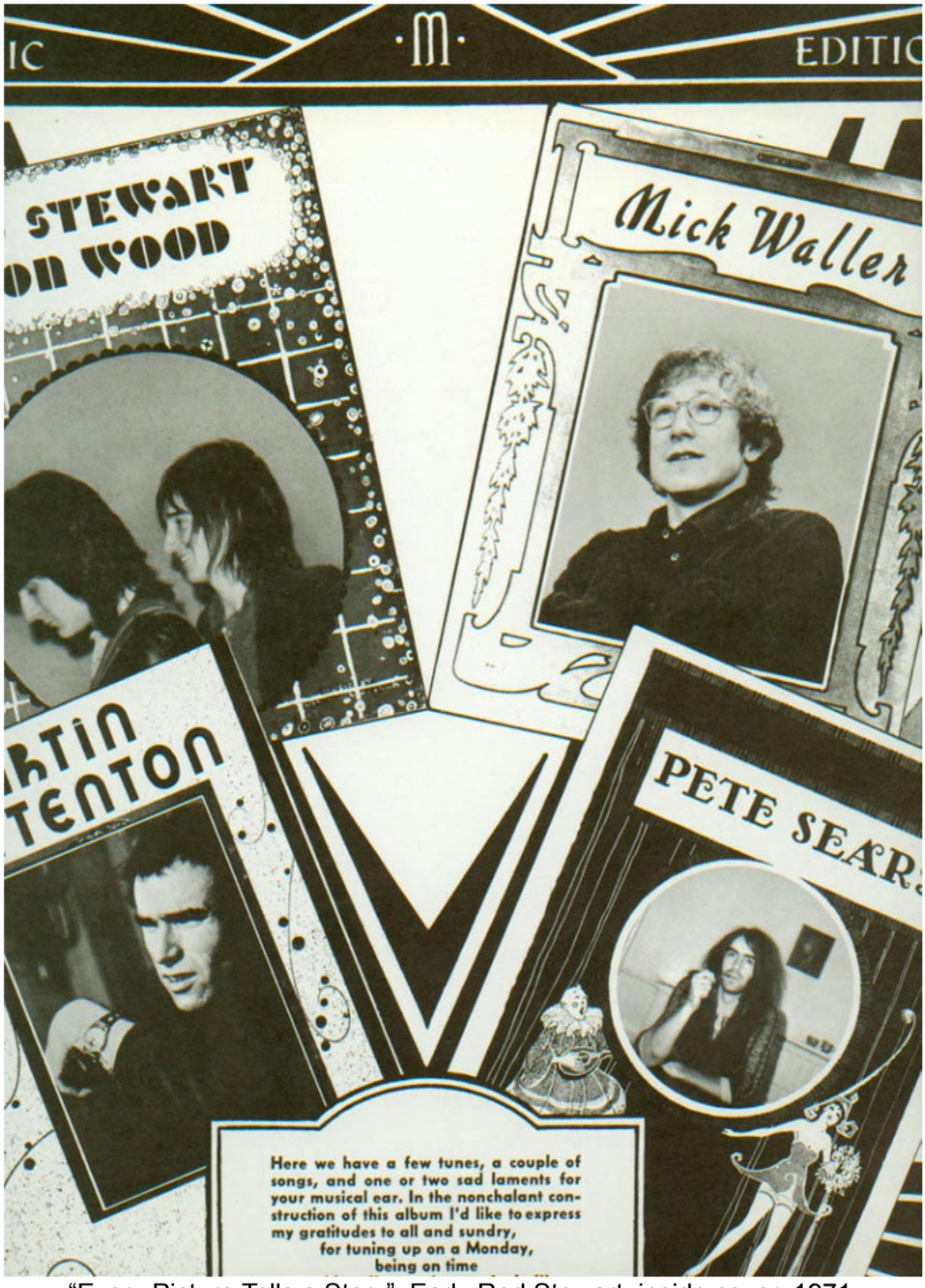


Pete Sears with the great Johnny Johnson. Further Festival, 1996.
Photo by Diana Quine.

Pete Sears, Jorma Kaukonen, Michael Falzarano & Vassar Clements. Suwannee Festival, Florida. March 1999.
Photo by Randy Ivey



Pete and Jeannette Sears backstage at the Bay Area Music Awards. 1982
Photo credit © Courtesy Roger Ressmeyer



"Every Picture Tells a Story". Early Rod Stewart, inside cover. 1971.

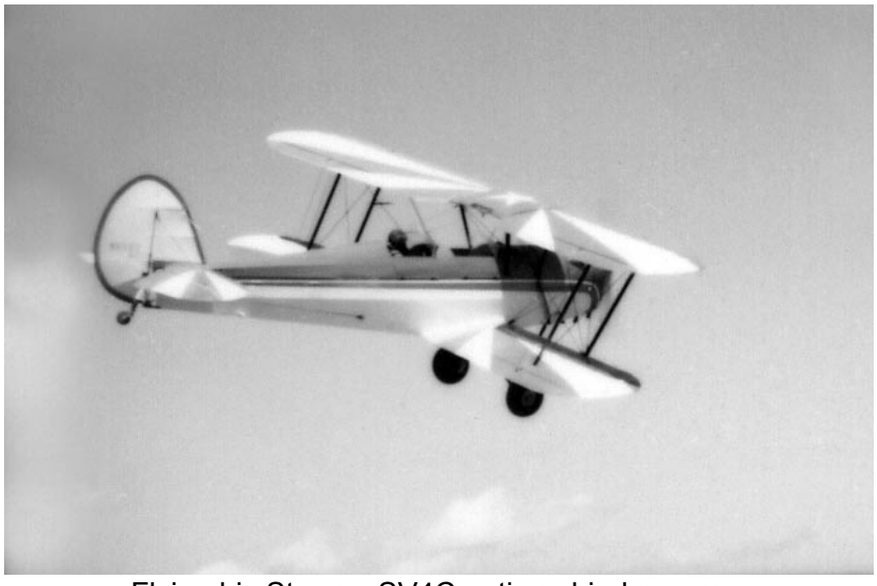
"Pete is a deep listener and a wonderful spirit to have musical conversation with. We have shared the stage many times and our musical moments together have always been emotional and powerful ones".
- Mickey Hart *(Grateful Dead, Planet Drum, Global Drum Project)*

Nick Gravenites and friends.

Jorma Kaukonen, Pete Sears & Michael Falzarano, 1996.
Fillmore, San Francisco.

Dawn Patrol
Photo by Goeff Wittmer

Eric McFadden, Pete Sears & Zigaboo Modeliste at 12 Galaxies, San Francisco.
Photo by Barbra Travalent



Flying his Stampe SV4C antique bi-plane over
San Francisco Bay.

Special thanks to: Jeannette, Dylan, and Natalie Sears, Chris Collins, College Of Marin, and Ursa Minor.