

Ear Training Exercises

Ted Greene 1975, March 10 and May 8

PART 1

Wherever the word “sing” is used, you might wish to substitute “hum” or “whistle” if you prefer to do these. If you do sing the exercises you will probably end up with a comfortable syllable, such as “la”, “ba” or whatever you like. The main thing is to make the sounds, whether it be by whistling, humming, singing or whatever (not playing through)

Try and learn to *visualize the neck of the guitar*, that is, visualize where the sounds are *on your instrument*, or you are only getting 50% of the benefit of the exercises.

One of the main ingredients in music is melody; these exercises will help train your ear to be able to hear and recognize good melodies by getting you familiar with lots of common intervals and patterns that are derived right from chords, as most melodies are. As with most musical things, don't expect good results right away; consistent practice will produce the benefits.

- 1) Starting from any note (which you can strike on the bottom string of the guitar), sing an ascending major scale. Same thing, but sing a descending major scale.
- 2) Sing the first five notes of any major scale; then sing only the 1st, 3rd, and 5th. Sing the 5th, 3rd, and 1st tones in that order; starting from the 5th, sing a descending major scale to the root (5 4 3 2 1).
Sing 1 3 5 3 1.
- 3) Play any major triad – then sing 1 3 5 3 1;
play any major triad; then sing the root only.
- 4) Play any pitch – call this pitch 1 – sing 1 3 5 3 1;
call it 5 and sing 5 3 1 3 5;
call it 3 and sing 3 1 5 1 3 and 3 5 1 5 3
- 5) Extend the range into other octaves: example: start on a very low pitch and sing 1 3 5 1 3 5 1;

↑ ↑
new octaves

- 6) Practice singing “leaps” such as:

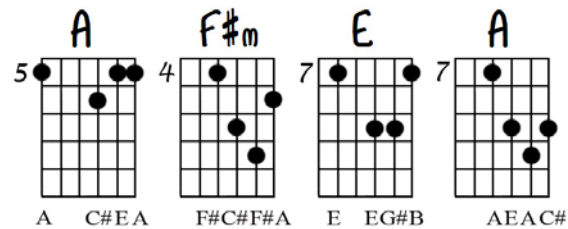


and others of your own devising.

- 7) Singin ascending and descending major scales starting from all the other degrees.
Example: using the C major scale, sing DEFGABCD, DCBAGFED; EFGABCDE; EDCBAGFE; FGABCDEF; FEDCBAGF, etc.
- 8) Starting from the root, sing all ascending intervals in the major scale.
Example: using the C major scale, sing CD, CE, CF, CG, CA, CB, CC (octave), CD (ninth), etc..
Descending: CD, CA, CG, CF, CE, etc.

- 9) Do exercise #8 but start from all other degrees of scale instead of the root.
- 10) This exercise requires 2 people: have someone play a major triad; sing the soprano (top pitch); figure out if it is the root, 3rd, or 5th of the chord.
- 11) Again two people are needed: you are given the name of the soprano note of a major triad to be played; triad is played, sing the triad and say whether the top note is the root, 3rd, or 5th.
- 12) Apply all above exercises to the natural, harmonic, and melodic minor scales and the minor triad.
- 13) Sing the diatonic triads in the major and minor scales in 1 3 5 3 1 order; then in 5 1 3 1 5, then 3 5 1 5 3.
- 14) You are given the root of a major scale; sing the I chord; now sing the V chord; now the IV chord; now the vi, iii, ii, and vii°. Likewise in the minor scales.
- 15) Sing all the chord progressions that you play on guitar. Example: using I vi V I in key of A:

Note: you may wish to mentally move the bass notes up an octave when it is very far from the other notes, so that you can sing these chords.



- 16) Apply as many of the exercises as you can to the diatonic 7th chords in major and minor scale.
- 17) From any given pitch sing the following intervals, ascending and descending:
(Ask about using songs as aids in this.)
m2, M2, m3, M3, P4, +4(d5), P5, +5 (m6), M6, m7 (+6), M7, octave, m9, M9, m10, M10.
- 18) Play any note on guitar; point to a note nearby and try to sing it; identify the type of interval created.
- 19) Sing diminished and augmented triads in various ways (it is harder out of context).
- 20) Apply as much of the logic on this page to the new sounds you learn as your vocabulary of chords expands.
- 21) Sing letter names in place of whatever syllable you have been using up to now.

Many of these exercises were borrowed from *Elementary Harmony* by Robert W. Ottman.

PART 2 (chord progressions)

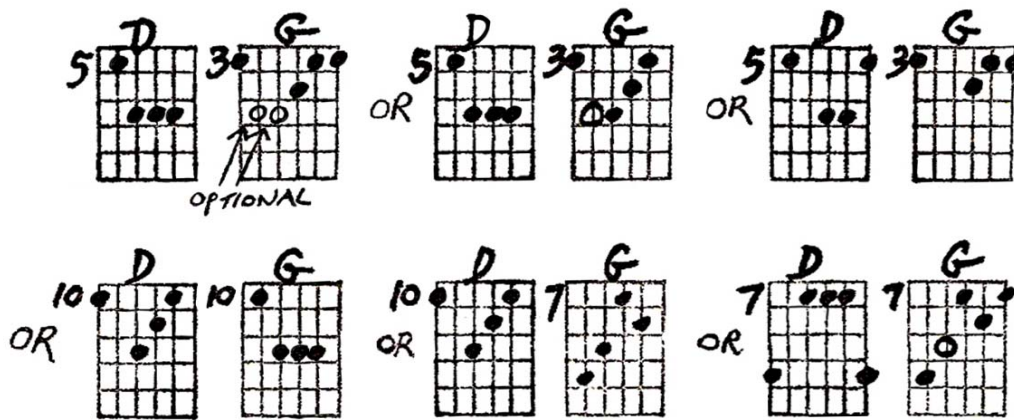
Most of the music that a person (in this country) hears is based on *chord progressions*; the ability to “hear” (recognize) these progressions is super-important for various reasons such as:

- 1) Being able to figure out songs, classical pieces, etc by “ear” off of records, the radio, and in live situations (like in the recording studio or at jam sessions)
- 2) Being able to better understand and appreciate what other players are doing when you are listening to live music in a club, concert hall, or whatever.
- 3) Being able to “follow along” when playing with other, even if you don’t know the material (unless the music is highly complex).

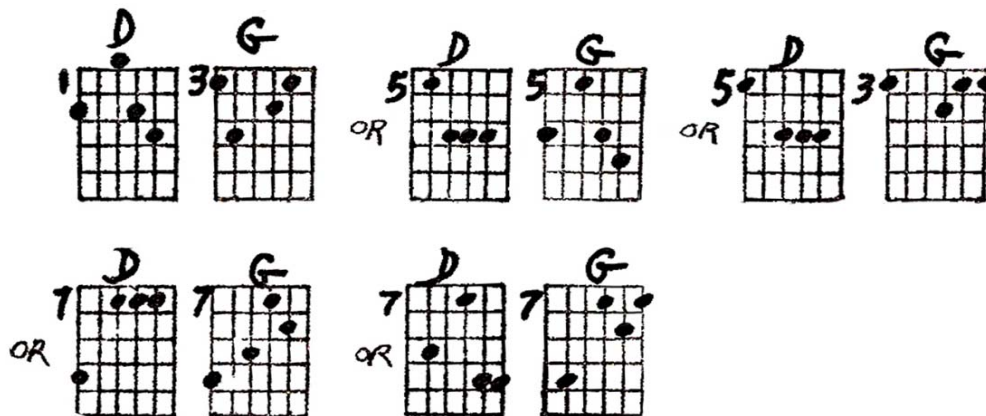
Learning to recognize chord progressions is like learning a language; at first the ear can detect differences but can’t identify them too easily. But by *focusing* in on one or a few sounds at a time, a person can absorb them. Naturally, repetition is required to really sink a sound in for good, but once it has sunk it, it is there for good.

The following list of progressions is give as a starting place—learning lots of songs or pieces, while *analyzing* and storing away the chord progressions, would be another way to tackle the problem (both ways are good). When practicing these progression, stick to basic root in the bass, chord fingerings at first (like barre chords); then later, try using inversions as well. Try different melody (soprano) notes and observe the effects. For example: using the progression I IV in the key of D you might play:

Using inversions:



Using root in the bass:



Notice the bass lines in these progressions (isolate the bass by itself – then play the progression listening just to the bass; many progressions are constructed over a pre-conceived bass line, so it is important to get used to listening to the bass as an independent line).

Try the progressions in various keys; don't worry about strumming or rhythms, just play the chords once each (but to repeat *each whole progression*, as mentioned above). Occasionally work from the bass line view, as above.

MAJOR KEYS

- | | | | |
|---------------------|---|----------------|---------------------|
| 1) I IV | 2) I V | 3) V7 I | 4) I IV V I |
| 5) I V IV I | 6) I7 IV7 | 7) I vi | 8) I vi ii V |
| 9) I vi IV V | 10) I7 vi7 ii7 V7 | 11) I iii | 12) I iii IV (V) I |
| 13) I iii7 IV/9 V7 | 14) vi iii(7) IV I | 15) I ii | 16) I7 ii7 |
| 17) I7 ii7 iii7 IV7 | 18) I ii IV (V) I | 19) I ii vi IV | 20) IV7 iii7 ii7 I7 |
| 21) ii7 iii7 (IV7) | 22) ii7 iii7 IV7 V7 | | |
| 23) iii7 vi7 ii7 V7 | 24) (I7) IV7 vii ^ø 7 iii7 vi7 ii7 V7 I (sequence; ask for explanation) | | |
| 25) vi7 ii7 V7 I(7) | 26) ii7 V7 I | | |

With Secondary Chords

- | | | | |
|-------------|------------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| 1) II V I | 2) II7 V7 I | 3) I vi II V | 4) I vi7 II7 V7 |
| 5) I III vi | 6) I III IV | 7) I III7 vi or IV | 8) I VI7 II7 V7 |
| 9) I I7 IV | 10) I VII(7) iii | | |

With Borrowed Chords

- | | | |
|--------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|
| 1) I bIII IV (V) I | 2) I bIII bVI | 3) I bVI |
| 4) I bVII | 5) I bVII bVI bVII | 6) I IV bIII bVII |
| 7) I v | 8) bVI bIII bVII IV I | 9) I bII |
| 10) I iv | 11) I iv6 | 12) I iv7 |

MINOR KEYS

Remember, III, VI, and VII are automatically flat.

- | | | | |
|----------------------------|--|---------------------------------|-------------|
| 1) i iv | 2) i IV | 3) i v | 4) i V |
| 5) i7 iv7 | 6) i7 IV7 | 7) i7 v7 | 8) V7 i |
| 9) i6 V7 | 10) i6 vi7 | 11) i iv V i | 12) i iv6 |
| 13) i6 iv7 or 6 V7 i | 14) i VI | 15) i VI ii ^ø 7 V(7) | |
| 16) i VI iv V(7) | 17) i vi ^ø 7 II7 V7 | 18) i III | |
| 19) i II(7) | 20) i bII(7) | 21) i III6 II7 bII7 | |
| 22) i VI7 | 23) i7 iv7 VII7 III7 VI7 ii ^ø 7 V7 i (sequence) | | |
| 24) ii ^ø 7 V7 i | 25) ii7 V7 i | 26) II7 V7 i | 27) i I7 iv |

Other important types of sequences, moving line type progression, bass line derived progressions, and blues progressions will be covered separately later.



If you wish to make the progressions sound more “jazzy,” you might add modern extensions and altered chords.

Ear Training Exercises - Part 1

Wherever the word "sing" is used, you might wish to substitute "hum" or "whistle" if you prefer to do these. If you do sing the exercises, you will probably end up with a comfortable syllable, such as "la" "ba" or whatever you like. The main thing is to make the sounds, whether it be by whistling, humming, singing or whatever. (NOT PLAYING THOUGH)

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- ① Starting from any note (which you can strike on the bottom string of the guitar), sing an ascending major scale, same thing but sing a descending major scale.
- ② Sing the 1st five notes of any major scale; then sing only the 1st, 3rd + 5th tones. Sing the 5th, 3rd + 1st tones in that order; starting from the 5th, sing a descending major scale to the root (5, 3, 2, 1). Sing 1 3 5 3 1.
- ③ Play any major triad - then sing 1 3 5 3 1; play any major triad; then sing the root only.
- ④ Play any pitch - call this pitch 1 - sing 1 3 5 3 1; call it 5 and sing 5 3 1 3 5; call it 3 and sing 3 1 5 1 3 and 3 5 1 5 3.
- ⑤ Extend the range into other octaves: Example: start on a very low pitch, and sing 1 3 5 1 3 5 1; sing 1 3 5 1 3 5 1 5 3 1 5 3 1
NEW OCTAVES
- ⑥ Practice singing "leaps" such as:  and others of your own devising.
- ⑦ Sing ascending and descending major scales starting from all the other degrees → EXAMPLE: using the C MAJOR SCALE, sing DEFGABCDEF, DCBAGFED; EFGABCDEF; EDCBAGFE; FGABCDEF; FEDCBAGF etc.
- ⑧ Starting from the root, sing all ascending intervals in the major scale → EXAMPLE: using the C MAJOR SCALE, sing CD, CE, CF, CG, CA, CB, C C (OCTAVE), C D (NINTH), C E (TENTH), etc.
 Descending: CB, CA, CG, CF, CE etc.
- ⑨ Do exercise ⑧ but start from all other degrees of scale instead of the root.
- ⑩ This exercise requires 2 people: Have someone play a major triad; sing the soprano (top pitch); figure out if it is the root, 3rd or 5th of the chord.
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- ⑬ Sing the diatonic triads in the major + minor scales in 1 3 5 3 1 order; then in 5 1 3 1 5; then in 3 5 1 5 3, in same orders as ⑬
- ⑭ You are given the root of a major scale; sing the I chord; now sing the IV chord; now the III chord; now the VI, III, II, and VII. Likewise in the minor scales.
- ⑮ Sing all the chord progressions that you play on guitar → EXAMPLE: using I VI V I in key of A →  NOTE: you may wish to mentally note the bass note up an octave when it is very far from the other notes, so that you can sing these chords.
- ⑯ Apply as many of the exercises as you can to the diatonic 7th chords in major + minor scales.
- ⑰ From any given pitch sing the following intervals, ascending + descending: m2, M2, m3, M3, P4, +4 (d5), P5, +5 (m6), M6, m7 (+6), M7, OCTAVE, m9, M9, m10, M10
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USING ROOT IN BASS:

OR

USING INVERSIONS:

Notice the bass lines in these progressions (isolate the bass by itself - then play the progression listening just to the bass; many progressions are constructed over a pre-conceived bass line, so it is important to get used to listening to the bass as an independent line).

Try the progressions in various keys; don't worry about strumming or rhythms, just play the chords once each (but do repeat each whole progression, as mentioned above). Occasionally work from the bass line view, as above.

MAJOR KEYS

- ① I IV ② I V ③ V I ④ I IV V I ⑤ I V IV I
- ⑥ I 7 IV 7 ⑦ I vi ⑧ I vi ii V ⑨ I vi IV V
- ⑩ I 7 vi 7 ii 7 V 7 ⑪ I iii ⑫ I iii IV (V) I
- ⑬ I iii 7 IV 9 V 7 ⑭ vi iii (V) IV I ⑮ I ii ⑯ I 7 ii 7
- ⑰ I 7 ii 7 iii 7 IV 7 ⑱ I ii IV (V) I ⑲ I ii vi IV
- ⑳ IV 7 iii 7 ii 7 I 7 ㉑ ii 7 iii 7 (IV 7) ㉒ iii 7 iii 7 IV 7 V 7
- ㉓ iii 7 vi 7 ii 7 V 7 ㉔ (I 7) IV 7 vii 7 7 iii 7 vi 7 ii 7 V 7 (SEQUENCE, ask for explanation) ㉕ vi 7 ii 7 V 7 I 7 ㉖ ii 7 V 7 I

MINOR KEYS

- remember, III, VI, + VII are automatically flat.
- ① i iv ② i IV ③ i v ④ i V ⑤ i 7 iv 7 ⑥ i 7 IV 7
 - ⑦ i 7 v 7 ⑧ V 7 i ⑨ i 6 V 7 ⑩ i 6 IV 7 ⑪ i iv V i ⑫ i iv 6
 - ⑬ i 6 iv 7 6 V 7 i (6) ⑭ i VI ⑮ i VI ii 7 V (7)
 - ⑯ i VI IV V (7) ⑰ i vi 7 7 II 7 V 7 ⑱ i III ⑲ i II (7)
 - ㉑ i bVII (7) ㉒ i III 6 IV 7 bVII 7 ㉓ i VII
 - ㉔ i 7 iv 7 VII 7 III 7 V 7 ii 7 7 V 7 i ㉕ ii 7 7 V 7 i
 - ㉖ ii 7 V 7 i ㉗ II 7 V 7 i SEQUENCE ㉘ i I 7 IV

WITH SECONDARY CHORDS

- ① II V I ② II 7 V 7 I ③ I vi II V ④ I vi 7 II 7 V 7
- ⑤ I III VI ⑥ I III IV ⑦ I III 7 VI 7 ⑧ I VII 7 II 7 V 7
- ⑨ I I 7 IV ⑩ I VII (7) iii

WITH BORROWED CHORDS

- ① I bIII IV (V) I ② I bIII bVII ③ I bVI ④ I bVII
- ⑤ I bVII bVII bVII ⑥ I IV bIII bVII ⑦ I v ⑧ bVII bIII bVII IV I
- ⑨ I bII ⑩ I IV ⑪ I IV 6 ⑫ I IV 7

Other important types of sequences, moving line type progressions, bass line-derived progressions, and blues progressions will be covered separately later.

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