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LESSON 5: PUTTING THE CHORDS TO USE

MAJOR 7TH AND MINOR 7TH CHORDS

You may have noticed how “jazzy” major and minor 7th chords sound. While not commonly used in bluegrass, these 7th chords are often used in place of regular major and minor chords in jazz. We’ll use them to “jazz up” a few bluegrass and folk standards.

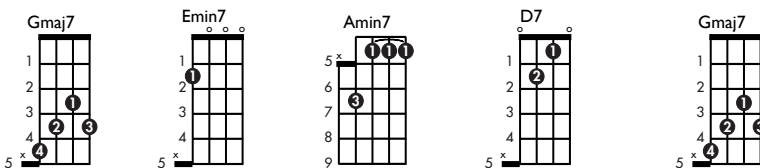
THE TURNAROUND

A *turnaround* in music is a short passage at the end of one section that leads to the next section that follows. Sometimes a turnaround is also used as an intro to a song. The chord progression of 6–2–5–1 is very common in many kinds of music. In bluegrass, this is the chord progression for the song “Salty Dog Blues.” Try it in the key of G:

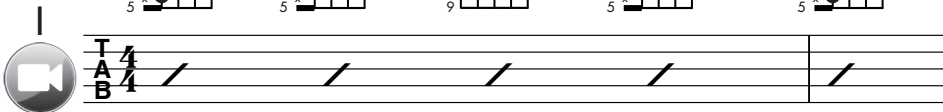
G(I) E(6) A(2) D(5) G(I)

Let me be your salty dog or I won’t be your man at all. Honey let me be your salty dog.

In this bluegrass song, the chords are played as major chords, but try playing them as major 7th and minor 7th chords and you’ll hear how it could be used as the final passage in songs like “Misty” or “Take the A Train,” or pretty much the whole song for “I’ve Got Rhythm.”



Play “Salty Dog Blues” but with major 7th and minor 7th chords for the jazziest version ever!



AUGMENTED AND DIMINISHED CHORDS

Augmented and diminished chords both sound like they want to resolve into another chord, and that’s the way to use them. Try playing D+ after D7 in this jazzy version of “Salty Dog Blues.”

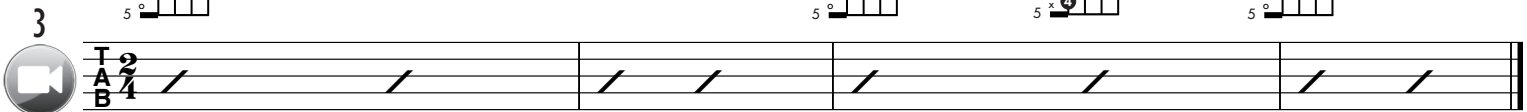
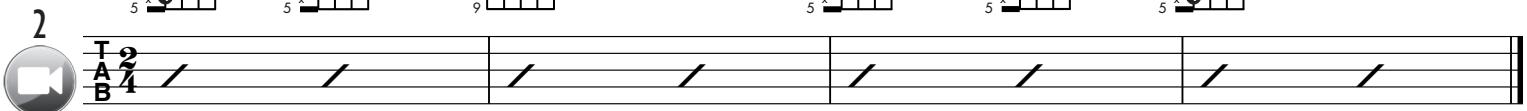


Let me be your sal - ty dog or I won’t be your man at all. Ho - ney let me be your sal - ty dog.

Another trick is to try a C[♯]7 (C[♯] diminished 7th) in place of a C7, like here in “Lonesome Road Blues.”



Go - ing down this road feel - ing bad. I’m go - ing down this road feel - ing bad.



LESSON 2: MELODIC-STYLE MINOR-SCALE EXERCISES

We learned in Chapter 5 that the natural minor scale uses the same notes as its relative major. So, for example, when you play the E Natural Minor scale, you'll be playing the same notes as the G Major scale. We also learned that the melodic minor scale is played differently ascending than it is descending. Following are a few examples of melodic minor scales played in melodic style. Remember to revert to the natural minor scale when you're descending.

40

G Melodic Minor

41

A Melodic Minor

42

E Melodic Minor

43

D Melodic Minor

Let's see how one-octave B and C Melodic Minor scales can be easily played in melodic style.

44

C Melodic Minor

45

B Melodic Minor

LESSON 3: COMBINING MELODIC STYLE AND SINGLE-STRING STYLE

The next step is to combine melodic style with single-string scales. Try Ex. 46, which is a G Major scale pattern in melodic style going up the neck, switching to single-string style when melodic style is no longer convenient.

46

G

CHAPTER 8

Combining Rolls with Melodic and Single-String Style

LESSON 1: DECONSTRUCTING BRILLIANCY

“Brilliancy” is a fiddle tune in three parts. We’ll work through the melody in each part and show how rolls, melodic style, and single-string style combine to create the arrangement.

BRILLIANCY: PART I

The beginning of “Brilliancy” starts with a 4th-string slide, a pinch, and a 3rd-string slide into a C chord, so it’s very banjo-y so far.

65

SL G C G

T A B

T I M T M I M T M I T M

The melody of the next two measures plays over A Minor and D Major chords and follows their respective scales. Ex. 66 showcases the melody exclusively in single-string style, while Ex. 67 shows how to play the same melody over the first measure (in Amin) in melodic style. In the second measure of Ex. 67, a hammer-on is used to play the open 4th string to the 4th fret. This hammer-on will enable you to switch your right-hand fingering to end with T instead of I, helping to set up the next line of the song in Ex. 68.

66

Amin D

T I T I T I T I T I T I T I

67

Amin D H

I T I M T I T I T I T I T

The next four measures restate the melody in the first four measures but with some variations. You’ll start with a turnaround on the 3rd and 4th strings instead of the slide and pinch that introduces the song. Also, we’ll be playing the C chord in a new position. Instead of playing it at the 1st and 2nd frets, the same notes are available at the 5th fret, so we’ll use that option to play the C chord in Ex. 68.

68

G C Amin D G

P P

I T I M T I M T I M I T M I T M I T I M T I T I T I T I T

That covers Part I of “Brilliancy.” Like many fiddle tunes, each part of this song is repeated, so pay close attention to the repeat signs and the first and second endings when you get to the full arrangement on page 35. Now, on to Part 2.

LESSON 5: BLUES LICKS OVER I, 4, AND 5 CHORDS

The real magic of the pentatonic and blues scales happens when you play them over our standard I, 4, and 5 chord progression. The notes of the minor pentatonic or blues scale can be played over all three chords! In the example below (which is a basic 12-bar blues chord progression), you'll see that all of the notes are from the G Minor Pentatonic and G Minor Blues scale. But, this doesn't mean we have to play in the key of G Minor. When you play the $\flat 3$ rd or $\flat 5$ th of your key over a major chord, those notes are called *blue notes*—and they give the blues its character and flavor.

The 12-bar blues is a very common chord progression. It can be played in any key, usually featuring the I, 4, and 5 chords, and is a foundation of blues music. But, it is also widely found in rock, country, bluegrass, folk, and many other types of music. Try the example below (watch the companion video if you need help with the rhythm).

12-BAR BLUES IN G

105



We also have the option of playing the C and D Major Pentatonic scales over the C and D chords. Let's see how that sounds in Ex. 106.

106



BANJO AMPLIFICATION

At some point in your banjo playing career, you may be asked to play on stage. When that happens, you'll most likely need to amplify your banjo with either a microphone or an electronic device called a *pickup* (not to be confused with pickup notes). Here are a few tips on using microphones, pickups, and amplifiers.

MICROPHONES

When playing on stage, with or without a band, you'll probably be using microphones. There are a few common setups for microphones, or mics.

1. **Single mic setup:** This is reminiscent of the old days when everyone played and sang into one mic. The mics used for this setup usually have a wide pickup pattern (which means they pick up from a wide area). Approach this setup the same way as you would playing in a living room. When the singer is singing, play quieter, and then get closer to the mic when it's time for you to solo.
2. **Multiple mic setup:** This is the most common setup. Here, individual instruments or singers have their own mic. Again, step closer (maybe 2–3 inches) to the mic when it's time to solo and back up a little (8–12 inches) when playing backup. You can try pointing the mic to various parts of the front of your banjo to find a tone you like, but placing the mic in front of the banjo head—where you can see it—will prevent you from accidentally bumping into it.



A band playing into one microphone. Author Ned Luberecki is on the far left; banjoist Tony Trischka is on the far right.



A band playing with individual microphones. Ned Luberecki is on the far right.

HOW THE PROS WORK A MIC

The next time you watch a band perform live, spend some time observing how the banjo player works the mic. Pay attention to where the mic is placed during solos and backup playing, and listen for the difference in their sound.



Microphone pointed toward head near the junction of neck and body.



Microphone pointed toward lower end of head.



Clip-on microphone.