

Before I get too far into the plectrum banjo Technical Studies, I need to talk about scales, as most of the Studies are based on them (including one that I already posted); I know. . . *scales?!?! Yuck!* But just like you can't (or certainly shouldn't!) build a house without a foundation, you can't (or certainly shouldn't) build musical skills/knowledge without the foundation that *only scales* can provide. This is how the "serious study" of all "legitimate" instruments is done; why not the plectrum banjo? For the typical Peabody "chord melody" style of playing of course, scales are not so important, but *for any other style* (Grimshaw, Reser, Bechtel, Django, etc.) they are paramount. I've already covered the subject in my book, *The Plectrum Banjo: Beyond Chord Melody*, but it is well worth re-presenting them here in the context of these new Technical Studies. I've learned a few things in the five years since the publication of my book, proving that practice really does make *better* (only *perfect practice* makes perfect)!

I have found that *knowledge* is one thing—*proficiency* is another! It's not enough to just *learn* them; you simply must *practice* the scales as a separate entity on a regular basis in order to get the full benefit from them. Classical pianists are famous for practicing their scales for *several hours* every day, before they even get around to the piece they happen to be working on; believe me, they don't do it because they *like* scales (well. . . some of the strange ones do!). *We* don't see the *decades* of behind-the-scenes toil—or true *genius* in the case of a 10-year-old prodigy—that goes into the amazing, flawless performances they give in the concert hall. You will never see a "play-in-a-day" method for classical piano, and I don't think you should fall for one for the banjo either.

Realize that on the plectrum banjo, we have a big advantage over wind instruments and the piano; to play in another key, we simply move to the appropriate area of the fretboard and play the same fingerings. So while you are practicing your C Major scale, you are practicing all the rest of the Major scales as well. Having said this however, it is still important to learn and practice them in *every key*; *I have*, and it really helps in the process of learning the fretboard and training your ear.

I'm talking about "closed scales" here; you will not find any "open" strings in these exercises. Open-string scales are a different animal, one that the *tenor* banjo excels at, but only in a few basic keys. Playing in *all keys easily*—with closed scale patterns—is what the *plectrum* shines at! The only limitation is in range; it is difficult to play much more than an octave with these patterns. When you realize that most songs cover only an octave and a half at most though, this becomes a moot point; you don't need the tenor's two-octave range to play our music!

In this Technical Study, I cover only the "people's key" of C; once you have memorized these patterns, you can then easily apply your skill to the rest of the keys (which I will provide in a later Study). Speaking of patterns, there are four basic patterns for each scale (on the tenor, there is only one closed scale pattern *possible*); I categorize them according to how many notes are played on each string. The patterns are: 2-2-2 (two notes on each string = 6 notes, so an "incomplete" scale), 3-1-3 (another incomplete scale), 3-2-3, and 3-3-3 (3 notes on each string = 9 notes, so an "extended" scale). As a bonus, I include the only Major scale pattern that works on the 3rd and 4th strings; the 4-4 pattern. Otherwise, they all use only the highest three strings.

There are seven separate scales that we are concerned with here; collectively, they are called the "Church Modes." They have been around in various, evolving forms for centuries; today, we simply call them the "Modes." Before you freak out and say "*seven kinds of scales?!?!?*"—let me explain; there are seven notes in a scale. A C Major scale (or correctly, *Ionian*) goes from C, up one octave to the next C (using the eight-note, 3-2-3 pattern); slide up to the D and play the same series of notes (no sharps or flats) to the next D, and you have a *D Dorian* scale; slide up the E and play the same series, and you have an *E Phrygian* scale; F to F is an *F Lydian* scale; G to G is a *G Mixolydian* scale; A to A is an *A Aeolian* (or "Natural Minor") scale; and B to B is a *B Locrian* scale. Because they all share the same key signature, they are all technically C scales; if you were to play a two-octave C Major scale, you will have covered all seven Modes within those 16 notes!

The Ionian, Lydian, and Mixolydian scales can also be categorized as variants of a Major scale; the other four are Minor scale variants. It is important to learn and memorize the names of the scales, if for no other reason than so you can speak intelligently to other "educated" musicians! The important point is that each Mode *by itself* has its own unique fingering pattern. I should also point out that some of the Modes are very difficult to play on the tenor, but *all are easy* on the plectrum, proving to me that the plectrum is a better scale instrument than the tenor (of course I'm not biased at all)!

The overall "Modal" concept is perhaps the most important thing to learn from this Technical Study; many of the rest of the studies I will write are based on it. To learn each of the individual scales is simply a matter of following the fingerings set forth in the Tablature; the trick to it is in *hearing the differences* among the various scales and—most importantly—*hearing the overall sound* of the *complete* scale series. When internalized, you will begin to predict and expect each successive Mode. When I figure out a jazz pattern for instance (which will be a major part of the Technical Studies), the next thing I do is figure out how to adapt the pattern to the whole Mode series, so you can play it with any chord; it's like getting 7 times the bang for the buck!

So, enough said; here we go! If you have any difficulties, don't hesitate to contact me; I would be overjoyed to help!

C Ionian (Major)
 ♩ = 80
 0 1 3 4 0 1 3 4 1 3 1 2 1 3 1 2 4 2 1 2 4 1 2 4 1 3 1 3 4 1 2 4 1 2 4 1 2 4

4-4 2-2-2 3-1-3 3-2-3 3-3-3

D Dorian (Minor with sharpened 6th)
 2 4 1 3 2 4 1 3 4 2 1 3 4 1 3 4 1 3 1 2 4 1 3 4 1 2 4 1 2 4

2-2-2 3-1-3 3-2-3 3-3-3

E Phrygian (Minor with flatted 2nd)
 2 3 1 3 2 3 1 2 4 2 1 2 4 1 2 4 1 3 1 2 4 1 2 4 1 3 4 1 3 4

2-2-2 3-1-3 3-2-3 3-3-3

F Lydian (Major with sharpened 4th)
 1 3 1 3 1 3 1 2 4 2 1 2 4 1 2 4 1 2 1 3 4 1 2 4 1 2 4 1 2 4

2-2-2 3-1-3 3-2-3 3-3-3

G Mixolydian (Major with flatted 7th)
 1 3 1 2 1 3 1 2 4 2 1 3 4 1 2 4 1 3 1 2 4 1 2 4 1 2 4 1 2 4

2-2-2 3-1-3 3-2-3 3-3-3

A Aeolian (Natural Minor)
 2 4 1 3 2 3 1 3 4 2 1 2 4 1 3 4 1 3 1 2 4 1 3 4 1 3 4 1 2 4

2-2-2 3-1-3 3-2-3 3-3-3

B Locrian (Minor with flatted 2nd and 5th)
 2 3 1 3 1 4 1 2 4 2 1 2 4 1 2 4 1 2 1 2 4 1 2 4 1 2 4 1 3 4

2-2-2 3-1-3 3-2-3 3-3-3