

Modal Arpeggio Exercises I by Ron Hinkle

The more I have practiced and explored the Modal Arpeggios on the plectrum banjo, the more useful variations I have found. As I am sure this learning curve will continue indefinitely, there will be much more to come; I have barely *begun* to scratch the surface! As such, this is *not* a “complete” collection by any stretch of the imagination; just a teaser.

I continue to struggle with the rationale for these exercises; I know what they have done for *me*, but how to convincingly explain that to someone else? The best line of reasoning I can come up with at this point is this:

Doing *anything* that your fingers have *never done before* can only be a good thing physically. Also, if you have ever tried to play an “improvised” jazz line, but your fingers refused to do your mind’s bidding—it’s probably because they (your fingers) didn’t know the way. So, is it “improvised” if your fingers *have* been there before?

Of course! *True* spur-of-the-moment invention—*without the benefit of prior knowledge/practice*—is akin to being struck by lightning! It is the height of arrogance (or at least over-confidence) to think that you could *invent* something without at least a basic *framework* to go by! Or put another way, your “inventions informed by knowledge/practice” will be far better than any possible “inventions informed by ignorance.” These exercises represent just *one* of *many* usable frameworks until you develop the rare gift of *true invention*, using your prior-developed framework as a springboard.

Beyond just “knowing the way,” there are no better fretting-hand *exercises* than scales and arpeggios. They are the physical and musical roadmap for your particular instrument (whatever that may be). For plectrum banjoists—most of whom have never played anything beyond rhythm or Chord Melody—they are *necessary* for going beyond. *There are no magical shortcuts!* I guarantee that *everything* you do on the banjo (including Chord Melody) will improve dramatically with the physical and mental discipline afforded by them—*whether you ever develop the ability to use them musically or not*. Don’t ask why; just *do them* and find out for yourself! And eat your vegetables!

One more important piece of advice: Pay strict attention to the fingerings shown in the TAB! You may *occasionally* find a “better way,” but you will soon find that consistency is a quicker path to useful mastery. If you have small hands, you may need to make small shifts to reach them; this is not a *limitation*, but rather an *opportunity* for skill development!

#1: Building on your knowledge from the first Modal Arpeggio lesson, I wanted to take a slight step backward to ensure that you realize an important connection. All of the 4-note arpeggios (1-3-5-7) can be played on either the 4th and 3rd strings (first measure) or the 3rd and 1st strings (second measure). This can be confusing because I showed them in the first lesson as an extended arpeggio (1-3-5-7-9-11). Two *different* things, but closely *related* of course.

#2: Now I want to show you how you can connect the Modal series in an ascending and descending pattern. This requires a finger slide between each chord/arpeggio (pinky for the F-G slide, index finger for the D-E slide, etc.). Creative finger-sliding opens up endless possibilities!

#3: Here is another way to connect the arpeggios with a *bigger* slide. Being able to quickly and accurately shift between “positions” is another important “possibility multiplier.” You can of course play this in a descending pattern as well.

#4: Speaking of position shifts: Now I have combined the individual arpeggios into an interesting pattern; there are many ways to do this, depending on how far you shift (and which arpeggio you shift from and/or to). I included the arpeggio names for continuity sake, but they are not really important to the exercise; do not think of these as useful *chord progressions*, but simply as great *finger and mind exercises*. Again, there are limitless possibilities here.

#5: One more concept: This time I have combined the ascending *arpeggio* pattern with a brief descending *scale* pattern. I started with the Dm7 because the CM7 pattern has open strings, making it more confusing than effective. A couple of them seem like they would have better fingering patterns, but play as shown in the TAB for continuity sake. I have also included the Jazz 7th chords that these scale/arpeggios correspond with; I’ll talk more about the chords in a separate lesson. Beyond that, this is a fantastic speed exercise; start as slow as you have to for accuracy sake, and gradually build up your speed. As you increase the speed, also work on keeping your fingertips as close as possible to the fingerboard; use your fingers—and *not your hand*—to play these! The more *efficient* you are *now*, the *quicker* you will be *later*!

Modal Arpeggio Exercises

Plectrum Banjo

Ron Hinkle

#1

Cmaj7 Dm7

Em7 Fmaj7

G7 Am7

Bm7(b5) Cmaj7

#2

Chords: Cmaj7, Dm7, Em7, Fmaj7, G7

Fingerings: 0-4, 0-4, 0-3, 5-2, 5-2, 4-7, 4-7, 3-7, 9-5, 9-5, 7-11, 7-10

Chords: Am7, Bm7(b5), Cmaj7, Bm7(b5), Am7

Fingerings: 12-9, 12-9, 12-9, 11-14, 10-14, 10-14, 15-12, 16-12, 16-12, 11-14, 10-14, 10-14, 12-9, 12-9, 12-9

Chords: G7, Fmaj7, Em7, Dm7

Fingerings: 7-11, 7-10, 7-10, 9-5, 9-5, 9-5, 4-7, 4-7, 3-7, 5-2, 5-2

#3

Chords: Cmaj7, Em7, Dm7, Fmaj7, Em7, G7

Fingerings: 0-4, 0-4, 0-3, 7-3, 7-4, 7-4, 2-5, 2-5, 2-5, 9-5, 9-5, 9-5, 4-7, 4-7, 3-7, 10-7, 10-7, 11-7

Chords: Fmaj7, Am7, G7, Bm7(b5), Am7, Cmaj7

Fingerings: 5-9, 5-9, 5-9, 12-9, 12-9, 12-9, 7-11, 7-10, 7-10, 7-10, 14-10, 14-10, 14-11, 9-12, 9-12, 9-12, 15-12, 16-12, 16-12

8

Bm^{7(b5)} Dm⁷ Cmaj⁷ Em⁷

#4

Cmaj⁷ Am⁷ Em⁷ Dm⁷ Bm^{7(b5)} Fmaj⁷

Em⁷ Cmaj⁷ G⁷ Fmaj⁷ Dm⁷ Am⁷

G⁷ Em⁷ Bm^{7(b5)} Am⁷ Fmaj⁷ Cmaj⁷

Bm^{7(b5)} G⁷ Dm⁷ Cmaj⁷ Am⁷ Em⁷

#5

Dm7 Em7

Fmaj7 G7

Am7 Bm7(b5)

Cmaj7