LIVE@5 - Episode #1 - Cool Scales: How to make them and what to do with them. Parable of Painting the Wall

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Let's talk about some scales. You have scales that are kind of happy, right? So that's just like a major scale, everybody knows a happy major scale like that. We have some sad scales like minor scales, or right, minor scales. We have some very different scales also, like a uh kind of like a Middle Eastern scale. So does anybody know how you make that Middle Eastern scale? Well, I'm going to tell you in a little bit how you do that, but first, let's start off with the formula for a major scale.

The major scale is pretty simple, and I understand that this is going to be, you know, a review for a lot of you, but the major scale formula here's our formula for the major scale: We're going to start on the root and then we're going to go up a whole step, another whole step, a half step, three more whole steps, and then a half step. So, if I'm starting, for example, so here's your formula, if I start on C and I go up a whole step, that's to D, another whole step would be E, and then a half step is F because there's no black key in between E and F, okay, and I know that's weird for the guitar players out there, but if you're looking at a piano, it makes a lot of sense, E to F is a half step, and then another hole, ho ho, and then finally, the last half step is between the seventh note of the scale and back to the root of the scale. So there you have the formula for the major scale.

If you want to play that Middle Eastern scale, this is kind of cool. We're going to start off with a half step, so we're actually going to flat the two and we're going to flat the six. All of these scales, well, not all of them, but the major scale has seven notes in it: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 even, and then you're back to one. So, if I flat the two and I flat the six, that gives you that really cool scale. There are some other cool scales too, like blues scales. That one doesn't have seven notes in it; that one only has six. And then you have pentatonic scales, which is something that guitar players talk about all the time, and a really cool way to demonstrate a pentatonic scale on the piano. Anybody have any idea how many notes are in a pentatonic scale? I don't see any answers here. Oh, thanks, Harrison. Yes, this is a shout-out to the shirt here. This is a shout-out to Breakthrough Percussion. Yeah, they had their last show of the season last night. It was really cool. Anyway, there are five notes in a pentatonic scale. And if you play, if you play just the black keys on a piano, that gives you a pentatonic scale [plays music].

All right, well, we're going to come back to uh, the piano in just a little bit, and we're going to talk about some really cool things you can do when you're practicing the scales, okay, cuz I

know it can be really boring, you know, to do this all day long, just to do that over and over again can get a little tedious. So, I'm going to give you guys some really cool little tricks and twists that you can throw into your scale practice to make it a lot more interesting, all right. But before we do that, we're actually going to turn our attention over here to Mr. Guitar. This is Eric Myers, one of our guitar instructors, because I want him to demonstrate the major scale on the guitar with the correct fingering for the scale. How's that perfect, okay? Hi, everybody. So, let's go back over that major scale. Let's stick to the key of C for now because that's what Kirk did. We'll give you a major scale, the correct fingering, and of course, as on the piano, there are a lot of different places to play it, but let's play it up here on the eighth fret so we can go all the way, kind of to the highest notes in this position on the guitar. So, just as Kirk said [plays music].

Just as Kirk said, we could go C, D, E, F, G, A, B, back to C. D, E, F, G, A, B, no, sorry, back to C. You can reach up and grab the D with your pinky if you want to, if it's accessible in this position. This is usually the first position that we all kind of learn. So, I'll do it once more, plain old C major scale and grab the D if you want to, but back down to C. Okay, then Kirk also talked about minor and pentatonic. And as he said, guitar players kind of live in pentatonic, and with good reason. It's very user-friendly on the guitar and because we play a lot of blues and a lot of rock and all kinds of things, pentatonic is very useful.

So, let's stick with the key of C, but I'm going to play the A minor pentatonic scale because it is the same as the C major pentatonic scale. So, this is what it sounds like. And for most guitar players out there, especially if you're a blues or rock guy, this is probably the first scale if you haven't learned it already, probably the first one that you'll ever learn. And it's very, very useful. As Kirk mentioned before, there are only five notes, and here's what it sounds like. We're in the key of E. We're going to play the pentatonic major scale. I'm going to play it starting on the fifth fret. This will probably look familiar to a lot of you, and then back up to the minor third and down to the A minor third up here. That is a C. Now, that might have sounded kind of minor, so let me play the same notes but in that same C position, and it will sound very, very major. Here we go. And then you want to reach up and grab it like that. So, we have a C major chord here, here's a C major scale, here's the pentatonic major scale, and then if you want, but we can also play it in a different position, and here's that position again because it's very user-friendly. I'll start on the C this time and it'll sound a lot more major there you go.

Now, if we want to play minor as Kirk did, same situation. Let's start in the key of C, but we'll just play a C minor scale. Let me start that one again. That was awful. I was looking up and setting it down. [Music] So, that would be C minor. A little sloppy in the first go-round. So, you now have your basic C major scale, top to bottom. You have your C major pentatonic

scale. You have your C minor scale. Can you do the A minor one more time? And yeah, we'll do the A minor. And by the way, the fun thing about this one is as you'll learn more, you'll learn about a thing called a relative minor, and there's so much about it. Half the time if we're playing in a major key, we might just want to play the relative minor. It sounds really good on the guitar. It's also again, it's very user-friendly. So, let's play A minor pentatonic, or actually, we can play the whole A minor scale if you like, but for the moment, let's play because we're in C, let's play A minor pentatonic. They're really pretty interchangeable, but here's how it would sound. [Music]

Can you walk us through that real slow? Yeah, so let's go through it real slow. By the way, Kirk was talking before about intervals, and of course, pentatonic only has five notes. So, let's go through those if we're going to use this A minor pentatonic scale. We're still on the key of C, but we would go A and then to A minor third, D, whole step, G, whole step up to A, and if we go top to bottom, it's very simply, we're back at A. So, let's start over. There's A, and then finally we resolve back to C. Wow, awesome. Alright, cool, well, thank you very much for that little uh tutorial. Hope that helps. Okay, say goodbye to Eric for now. Now, we're going to turn back to the piano and talk about a couple of cool things that you can do with your scale practice.

Alright, first idea, well first of all, let's talk about the fingering for the A major scale for your right hand. We're just going to keep it as simple as it can be. So, if I start on C and I'm just going to go up the white keys because that happens to be the key of C, so it's C, D, E with 1, 2, 3. C, D, E, and then your thumb is going to cross under to F, G, A, B, C. If we just go one octave, you'll land with five on C (1, 2, 3, 4, 5) starting from F so (1, 2, 3, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5), right? And then it's just the reverse going back down (5, 4, 3, 2, 1, 3, 2, 1). Left hand (5, 4, 3, 2, 1, 3, 2, 1) and then (1, 2, 3, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5). So, the left hand when it's going down is where the thumb will cross under like so. Going up, the third finger crosses over (3, 2, 1, 2, 3, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5). Most of the scales that you're going to learn on the piano use that fingering (1, 2, 3, 1, 2, 3, 4, 1, 2, 3, 1, 2, 3, 4). That is the pattern for just about every scale that you're going to be learning on the piano.

Now, how about a couple of fun ways to practice these things? So, the first way is to change up the rhythm a little bit. So maybe do something like you can swing it instead of playing the notes just totally straight like this. You can swing it, okay, or come up with something. So, that's one idea. A couple of other ideas are to play in different feels. So, the first one is just, say, quarter notes. We could do eighth notes [Music]. And then if you want to get a little bit more advanced, you can do triplets and sixteenth notes, accenting each downbeat. So, for example, okay, for triplets, and you're going to go – well, the easiest way to do it is to go up three octaves and then back down three octaves, and then the same thing for sixteenth notes, you'd go up four octaves and back down four octaves, okay?

Um, a couple of other fun variations for practicing when you're doing hands together. Now, I can tell you this, my guess is that almost every single one of the piano players out there are going to really struggle with this next one: going to play one hand loud and the other hand soft. So, let's say forte with the right hand (piano with the left), it'll look and sound like [Applause] [Music]. Okay, pretty much all you could hear was my right hand because my left hand was so soft. And then you reverse it, do the left hand forte and the right hand piano. I challenge you to try that, and my guess is that most of you are actually going to have a really hard time even playing the first note at different volumes, um, right hand versus left hand. So, there's your first little challenge.

The next challenge is to play one hand staccato and the other hand legato. So, you're going to play, let's say, the right hand staccato while the left hand plays legato. If you don't know what that means yet, you're probably actually not ready to start playing scales hands together. But staccato is like that, detached, very short and detached. Legato, meanwhile, is smooth and connected like that. So, okay, last one, and this one's actually really kind of fun, is to do a different time signature with one hand as the other. So, here's just a simple example of two over one. Sorry, okay, so that's kind of fun, and then reverse it up where the left hand's playing two while the right hand's playing one. Alright, so just a couple of really cool fun little variations there.

Alright, last thing, last thing for today. So, there are some variations on scales. Knock yourselves out! Let's see who can learn the most scales in the next couple of weeks while we're on this extended spring break. Alright, that'll be part of our practice-athon.

Speaking of the practice-athon, you want to start keeping track today of all the minutes and hours that you spend practicing over the next couple of weeks. Because there are going to be prizes for everybody! There will be milestones to hit, so say for example, at 100 minutes of practice and then 200 and so on. Uh, we're going to have prizes for everybody, and then there will be some really good prizes for the kids that you know are at the top of the heap.

Parable of Painting the Wall

Last thing I want to finish with, as I promised in the email, is the parable of painting the wall. So, each day this week, I think we're going to have um, a parable that I'd like to share with you. This one is called painting the wall. And let's say I need to paint this wall. So here I've got my paintbrush as you can see, and I need to paint this wall. So, I think what I'm going to do is

I'm going to start up here in the top corner and I'm just going to start painting from the corner all the way down and then I'm going to keep going and eventually I'll have the entire wall painted. And then I stand back and I say, "Oh wow, looks like there's a few spots I missed. I'm going to have to fix it. I missed a few spots." Well, I had so much fun painting this wall yesterday, I think I'm just going to paint the whole thing all over again, and hopefully I'll get those spots I missed yesterday. So here we go, we start back up in the top corner and I start painting all the way down and I keep painting and painting, and eventually, an hour or so later, I get to the end of the wall and I stand back and oh no, those spots still didn't turn out right.

Well, I got nothing else to do with my day and I love painting so much, so why not? Tomorrow I'm just going to paint the whole wall all over again. So once again, I start up at the very top corner and I start painting the whole wall, and I get through with the whole wall, and wouldn't you know it, those spots still aren't done.

Well, so here's the question, and I'm sure most of you have kind of figured this out by now: what would be the smart thing to do? Should I just keep painting the whole wall or should I just focus on these spots that need to be painted? Well, let's suppose I've got a crystal ball and I can look into that crystal ball and ask how many times am I going to have to paint these spots for them to come out right? And the crystal ball says 20 times!

Times wow! Well, I would be really foolish to sit and paint the entire wall 20 times over just to get those spots right. So here's the question: what in the world does this parable of painting the wall have to do with learning music, which is what we're all here for and what we're all about? So, if you think you might know what painting the wall, this parable, what this is all about, comment or shoot us an email and we've got a prize that we'll announce tomorrow at our live session. We'll draw from all the correct answers, we'll draw a winner, and I will have a prize for whoever can explain to me what I'm talking about and why we're talking about painting this wall when we're talking about music. Alright, so I hope you guys enjoyed this broadcast. Hope you enjoyed learning a little bit more about scales, even if it was just a tiny little bit. Maybe we'll do a little bit more on it tomorrow and I'll share exactly how to do those blues scales that are so cool. Um, don't forget the formula: whole whole half, whole whole half, two holes and a half, three holes and a half. And if you want to do that Middle Eastern scale, here you go: the flat two and the flat six, that's the secret to that. Well, again, I hope that you're enjoying your time and using your extra time at home since you don't have school for the next couple of weeks to get in as much practice as possible. And we'll see you guys tomorrow, thanks bye!