

C O N T E N T S

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Design: Aean Pinheiro

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0-87487-681-8

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Printed in Canada

SECTION I: SCALES

Why practice scales?

Diatonic scales (that is, conventional major and minor scales) are the foundation of music as we know it. All serious musicians practice these scales as a basic and persistent aspect of their craft.

For the guitar, the study of scales serves several purposes. Foremost among these is conceptualizing the lateral-longitudinal grid of the fingerboard. We learn to associate spacings of the fingers with musical intervals, and these in turn with musical notations. Because of the complex nature of the fingerboard, with the same note appearing often in as many as four different places, this is a never-ending challenge that systematic scale practice of the right sort helps surmount.

But there are other benefits too. The simple linear patterns of scales allow the left hand to be maintained in a stable, economical position. The player can attend to movement, emphasizing the curved, compact shape of the fingers — tips pointed straight down at the fingerboard, good lateral separation. Under this kind of discipline, the repetitive movements of scales increase the strength and dexterity of the hand.

The right hand benefits as well. Scale study affords the most basic opportunity to cultivate tone-quality. The mechanism is the prepared attack: flailing at the string will not do! Instead, seat the nail against the string (flesh contact from *above only*) and *push* down and through, each time, heavy fingertips, as if lead weights were attached. The ear soon comes to discriminate the beautiful sound produced and to regulate the touch accordingly.

A corollary is the improved *synchronization* of the right and left hands. The guitar requires *two* different, simultaneous forms of small-motor coordination to produce a single note. Synchronized impulses are therefore essential, and intelligent practice of scales establishes a base-line of synchronization. The *prepare* impulse of the right hand overlaps the *attack* impulse of the left hand. With the note thus fixed by a finger of both hands, only then does the right hand execute. The whole process takes perhaps a fraction of a second, and in developed players is undetectable, but it is the cornerstone of refined technique. Practiced for control, it results in a staccato articulation; with the control relaxed, it produces the legato connection of notes, in which one tone seems to flow into the next.