

Strings? Why not!

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1 Philosophy

The idea of this method is to give you the tools to be creative with music. Concretely this means that instead of saying "The D chord is played using this shape", the following will be said: "A chord is constructed like *this*. So to play a D chord do *this* and you will end up with this shape". Where the "*this*" is some knowledge you will learn.

During the method you will notice that you will see certain constructs/symbols/etc. that you may not know yet and that are not explained directly. This is with intention. The idea is that by exposing you early on to something, while not consciously needing it yet, it is easier to learn the meaning of it later on.

When putting it in steps it looks as follows:

1. Expose you to new concepts so you have seen it, but not necessarily understand it yet.
2. Guided by exercises and songs, explain the previously shown concepts and how they work together.
3. Understand the theory of the concepts and be able to use them in playing.
4. Start at 1. again with new concepts.

2 Getting ready to play

2.1 Tuning

Your Ukulele needs to be in tune. This means that each string has a certain pitch. Even though this is already implied, it is important to note that the relative pitch difference per string is important as well. In Figure 2.1 you see the names (letters) of the string.

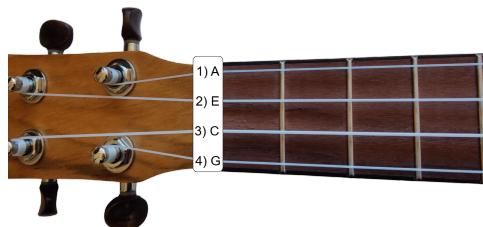


Figure 2.1: Names of the ukulele strings

A mnemonic is (from string 4 to 1):

- 4) **G** ood
- 3) **C** cooks
- 2) **E** eat
- 1) **A** all

You use a tuner to tune (see Figure 2.2). The tuner either gives a note value, and then you have to tune up or down to get the correct note on the screen. Or it shows a string number and you have to get the 'pointer' in the middle.

Be careful with tuning the string up (to a higher pitch). Especially the thinner strings can break if they are too tight.



Figure 2.2: Using a tuner on a ukulele

Another tuning options relies on the previously mentioned difference in pitch between the strings. In Figure 2.3 you see which positions on the neck have the same pitch as the thinner open string.

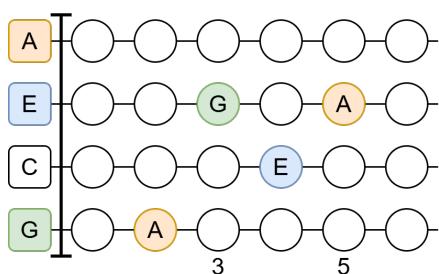


Figure 2.3: Relative tuning

3 First sounds

3.1 Fretboard

3.1.1 Note names

Each position on the neck has a different pitch. The metal bars on the neck are called the **frets**. For example, if someone asks to press the 2nd fret on the 3rd string, then you press your finger in the area of the green dot. Right next to the fret. See Figure 3.1.

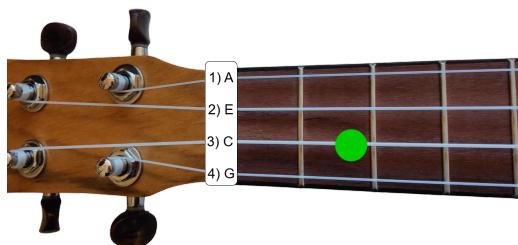


Figure 3.1: The green dot indicates the finer position for the 2nd fret on the 3rd string

In music there are 12 different pitches before coming 'back around'. When you come back at the same note letter you are an octave higher. The 12 different notes are shown below.

A A♯ B C C♯ D D♯ E F F♯ G G♯

You may see that there are only **7** different letters and **5** letters with a **#**. These **#** symbols are called **sharps**. On the fretboard a **#** means you move one fret up (to the body of the guitar).

In Figure 3.2 you see a music staff with underneath it tablature (TAB). In the next section we will learn to read the notes. For now you can try to read the tabs first to play the sequence.

Each line in the TAB section represents a ukulele string, with the 4th (G) string on the bottom. The numbers indicate which fret should be pressed (a 0 means an open string). So the TAB in Figure 3.2 says to first play an open G string, and then play each ascending fret up to the 12th fret.

Figure 3.2: An octave from C to C on the 3rd C string with sharps

Remember the relative tuning? This implies that the same note (and pitch) can be played on different strings. This is demonstrated in Figure 3.3.

Figure 3.3: An octave from C to C on strings 1 to 3 with sharps

Besides sharps there are also flats. A flat (\flat) means to go a halve tone (one fret) down. Rewriting Figure 3.3 with flats would look like Figure 3.4.

In Figure 3.4 also a new symbol is shown. The natural (\natural). This means that the note on which a \flat or \sharp was placed, now is 'normal' again. Whenever a \flat or \sharp is added to a note, it remains valid for this note up to the end of the measure. What a 'measure' is will be explained later. We will also practice more with sharps and flats later.

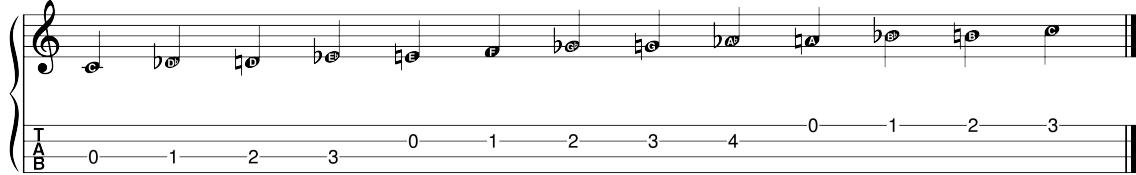


Figure 3.4: An octave from C to C on strings 1 to 3 with flats and naturals

3.2 Finger names

When playing ukulele, your fingers will be given a name. This makes it easier in music notation to indicate which finger should be used. The names are shown in Figure 3.5.

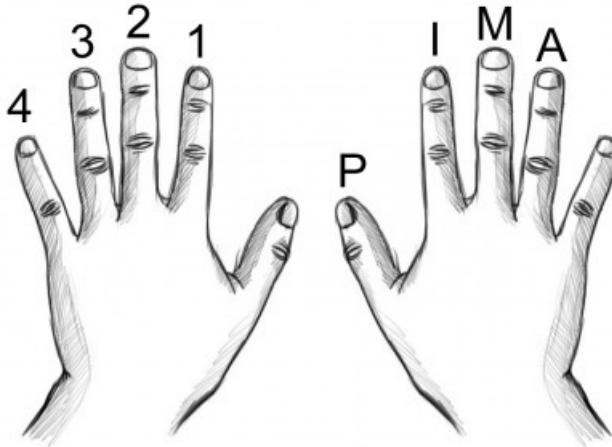


Figure 3.5: Names of the fingers [2]

3.2.1 Free and rest stroke

With a free stroke you hold your right hand in a relaxed position over the strings (see Figure 3.6). To play a string, move your finger through the string without lifting the upper part of your finger. Your finger should slightly curl into your hand. Once you made the sound, move your finger back to the relaxed position.

The trick now is to not hit the other strings, and to not 'pluck' the string (making a buzzing sound).



(a)



(b)

Figure 3.6: Free stroke position [1]

A rest stroke may sound a bit louder (but with some practicing a free stroke can be as loud). Like the name suggests, a rest stroke means that you move your finger through a string to play it, but now you let your finger rest on the next string.

3.2.2 Exercises

In the exercises below you see some new symbols above the notes. The numbers with circles around them indicate on which string the note should be played (this can also be seen from the TAB). The *i* and *m* indicate which right-hand finger should be used to play the note.

Play exercise Figure 3.7 first with a rest stroke and then with a free stroke to feel the difference.

Figure 3.7: Exercise: rest and free strokes

This second exercise (Figure 3.8) is similar to Figure 3.7, but a bit more challenging.

Figure 3.8: Exercise: changing strings with *i* and *m* fingers

In Figure 3.9 you will also use your left hand. The numbers above the notes indicates which left-hand finger should be used to press the fret. Play this exercise using alternating *i* and *m* fingers.

Figure 3.9: Exercise: fretting on 1st string

Exercise Figure 3.10 is adds another string to the exercise.

Figure 3.10: Exercise: fretting on 1st and 2nd string

4 Music notation

4.1 Music notation anatomy

4.1.1 Note names

You have already seen the music staff from Figure 4.1 in the previous exercises. However, the meaning of it was not explained yet.

The letters A-G on the staff show which line on the staff has which note value. The notes that are in between the lines nicely spell out "FACE", making it easy to remember. The Notes that are on the lines can be remembered with the mnemonic "Every Good Boy Does Fine". But another important thing to see is that the notes go up alphabetically (starting again with A after G).

The most left symbol () is called the G clef. Note that the inner/middle curl of the G clef is on the line of the G note.

The vertical line in the middle of the staff indicates the start/end of a measure. and the thicker vertical line at the end indicates the end of the piece.

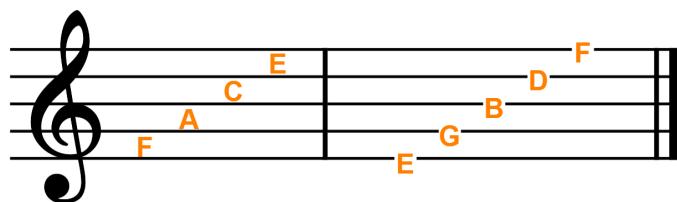


Figure 4.1: Note names on the staff in two measures

The ukulele is mostly known for its happy strumming of chords of course. A chord is a collection of notes. So while it maybe is more fun in the short term to start with strumming chords, it pays off in the long term to learn your notes and where they are on the fretboard. That way you can be more creative with your chords.

Additionally, training your finger-style playing from the start will help to play melody lines through the chords more easily.

Once we know our notes on the fretboard, we will start to play chords and learn how to construct them from scratch.

4.1.2 Counting

So far we have also only seen one type of note. The quarter note. However, there are more. See Figure 4.2. The $\frac{4}{4}$ time signature means that there can fit 4 (top number) quarter notes (bottom number) in a measure.



Figure 4.2: Note duration

Important: A whole note (○) equal 4 quarter notes (♩). It does **not** equal a whole measure.

There are also other time signatures. The top value indicates how many notes of the bottom number's duration fit in a measure. So a $\frac{3}{4}$ time signature can fit 3 quarter notes per measure. And a $\frac{6}{8}$ time signature can fit 6 eighth notes per measure. Note that $\frac{3}{4}$ and $\frac{6}{8}$ indicate the same duration per measure, but they give a different feel. This is demonstrated in Figure 4.3.

In Figure 4.3 you also see a new duration notation. In the first measure with $\frac{6}{8}$ timing, there are dots next to the notes (•). This means that the note has a duration of 1.5x its original duration.

The ">" symbol means that this note should be played with a more powerful accent. The **bold** numbers above the notes indicate the counting of the notes. A bold number means to put an accent on it, but played less accented than the ones where there is also an ">" symbol.

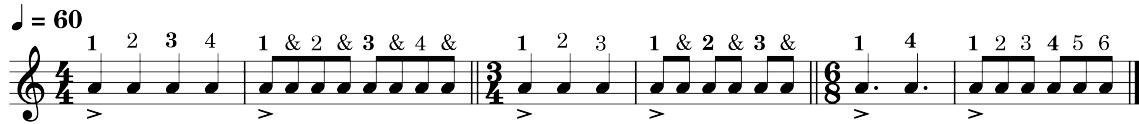


Figure 4.3: Time signatures

Where notes indicate when to play a sound, rests indicate when to be silent. In Figure 4.4 the most common rest durations are shown.

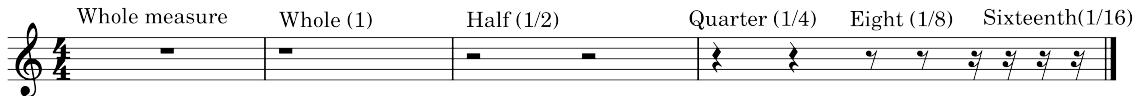


Figure 4.4: Rest notations of different duration

In Figure 4.5 an exercise is provided to count the rests. Remember to take this slow and to be conscious about the counts. As a help the tempo is set to the 60 quarter notes per minutes (BPM). This way each quarter note is 1 second. But feel free to play it slower.

It can also be helpful to use a metronome.



Figure 4.5: Rest notations of different duration

4.1.3 Learning the main notes

To learn the notes we will first start with the well known "Jingle bells". This song uses all non-sharp/flat notes on the 3rd and 2nd string of the ukulele up to the 3rd frets. See Figure 4.6 for the tabs of these notes.

Above the notes you see the left-hand fingers to be used. Use alternating *i* and **m** fingers.

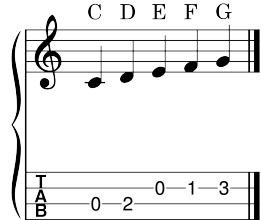


Figure 4.6: Notes used for Jingle bells

Jingle bells

Music: James Lord Pierpont
Arranged: Enzo Evers

Figure 4.7: Jingle bells

In preparation to play the "Tetris" tune, the notes from Figure 4.8 should be learned. Note that only the A note is new compared to the notes in Jingle Bells (Figure 4.6).

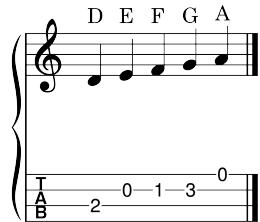


Figure 4.8: Notes used for the first part of the Tetris tune

Tetris (first part)

Music: Hirokazu Tanaka
Arranged: Enzo Evers

Figure 4.9: First part of the Tetris tune



The "Tetris" tune is derived from a Russian folk song called "Korobeiniki", which is based on a similar named poem written by Nikolay Nekrasov. [4]

In the next song you will learn the remaining non-sharp/flat notes on the first string. The B and the C.

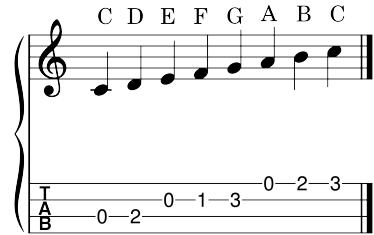


Figure 4.10: Notes used for the song "De Vogeltjesdans"



In Figure 4.10 you not only see the notes used in the song, but you also see the C major scale. Later on we will talk more about scales.

De vogeltjesdans

Music: De Electronica's
Arranged: Enzo Evers

Figure 4.11: De vogeltjesdans - De Electronica's



While most people know this as the Dutch titled "De vogeltjesdans", it is based on the original song called "Der Ententanz" composed by Werner Thomas. [3]

No new notes to learn for "Seven Nation Army" (Figure 4.12). Note, because of the limited low notes on the ukulele, Figure 4.12 is played slightly higher compared to the original recording.

Seven Nation Army

The White Stripes

Music: Jack White, Meg White
Arranged: Enzo Evers

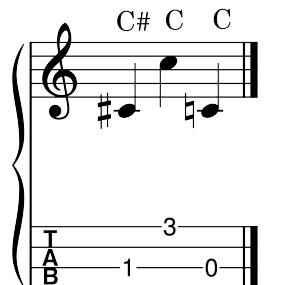


Figure 4.12: Seven Nation Army - The White Stripes

4.1.4 Sharps and flats

In the beginning on this method it was already mentioned that sharps \sharp increase the note by a half step and flats \flat decrease the note by a half step. It has also been mentioned that sharps and flats are valid for the duration of a measure. If a note should get its 'normal' sound back, a natural \natural symbol is placed in front of it. This undoes the sharp/flat for the rest of the measure (until another sharp/flat is placed).

What has not been mentioned yet, is that a sharp/flat placed on a note is valid only for that pitch of the note (position on the staff). See for example Figure 4.13a. Here you see that the first C (open third string) got a sharp, and is therefore now played a half tone (1 fret) higher on the 1st fret. The C that is played one octave higher on the first string is still a C. When the C note then gets a natural sign, it becomes the normal C note again which is played on the open third string. The same example can be given for flats (Figure 4.13b).



(a) Usage of sharps and naturals



(b) Usage of flats and naturals

Figure 4.13: Sharps, flats and naturals

Sometimes a song uses a note with a flat or sharp a lot of times. It can then be considered to be in a certain key (we will come back to that later). It is then not desired to add sharps/flats all over the sheet music. That could get messy. Instead, the sharps/flats used for the song are shown at the beginning of the piece and apply to all pitches of the notes (unless natural symbols are used). Note that this is different compared to adding sharps inside a measure, there it is only applied to that specific pitch.

See for example Figure 4.14 and Figure 4.15.

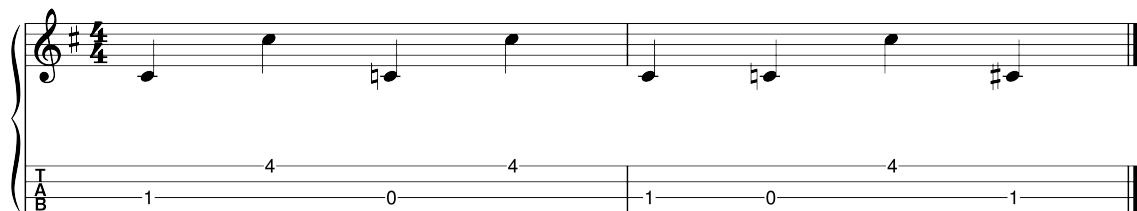


Figure 4.14: Example of adding sharps at the beginning of the music

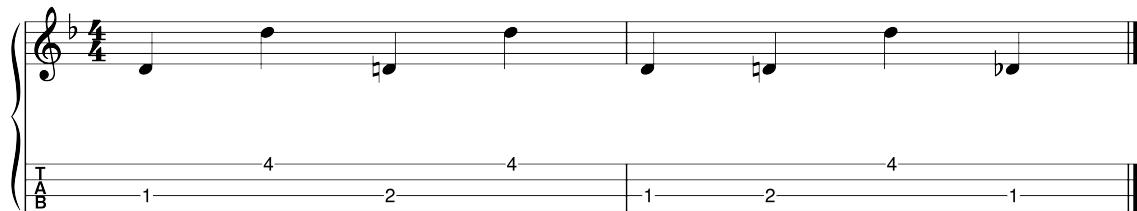


Figure 4.15: Example of adding flats at the beginning of the music

Before playing some pieces to learn the sharps and flats, let's first show the sharps and flats on the fretboard again:

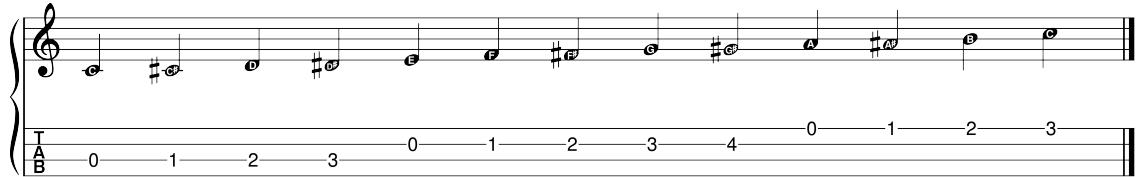


Figure 4.16: An octave from C to C on strings 1 to 3 with sharps

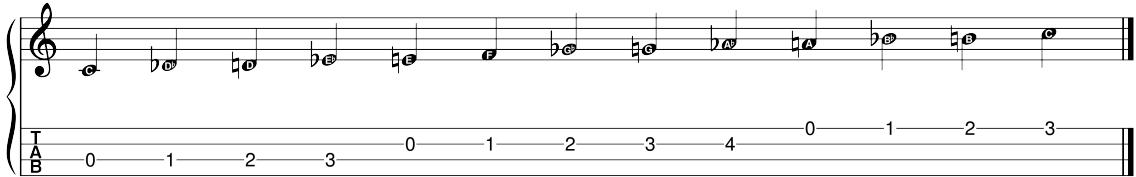


Figure 4.17: An octave from C to C on strings 1 to 3 with flats and naturals

Also remember that between each note, except for B-C and E-F, there are two half steps. Between B-C and E-F there is only one half step.

A	A [#]	B	C	C [#]	D	D [#]	E	F	F [#]	G	G [#]
A	B _b	B	C	D _b	D	E _b	E	F	G _b	G	A _b

Table 4.1: Sharp and flat intervals

Remember that a sharp and flat simply move the note a half step up or down respectively. So what would happen when the E note gets a [#]? It would become an F. And what does an F_b resolve to? An E indeed. The same holds for the B-C interval. B[#] is the same as a C and a C_b is the same as a B.

The music shown in Figure 4.18 doesn't show any symbols in the notes. But it does show two flat symbols at the beginning of the music. In this case it shows a B_{\flat} and an E_{\flat} . Note that these apply to any pitch of the B and E notes in the music.

An empty tablature staff has been added. You can fill this in yourself to help learn the position of the (flat) notes on the fretboard.

Memory
Cats (musical)

Music: Andrew Lloyd Webber
Arranged: Enzo Evers

A musical score for the song "Memory" from the musical "Cats". The score consists of a single treble clef staff in 6/8 time. The key signature is two flats, which applies to the B and E notes in the music. The tempo is marked as 70 BPM. Below the staff is an empty tablature staff with six horizontal lines, labeled T and B at the top left. The music itself is relatively simple, consisting of eighth-note patterns.

Figure 4.18: Memory from the Cats musical

Happy birthday uses a music-wide F^{\sharp} . It also introduces one new note. The high D note (in measure 6). This note has not been played in earlier songs yet. But try to see if you can figure out the position based on your knowledge of the note intervals (Table 4.1) and how that relates to the frets on the fretboard. If you want to know the answer, have a look at Figure 4.13b.

Happy birthday

Music: Patty Hill, Mildred J. Hill
Arranged: Enzo Evers

A musical score for the song "Happy birthday". The score consists of a single treble clef staff in 3/4 time. The key signature is one sharp, which applies to the F note. The music includes a high D note in measure 6. Below the staff is an empty tablature staff.

A continuation of the musical score for "Happy birthday", showing measures 6 through the end of the song. The score consists of a single treble clef staff in 3/4 time. The key signature is one sharp, which applies to the F note. The music includes a high D note in measure 6. Below the staff is an empty tablature staff.

Figure 4.19: Happy birthday

In Hedwig's Theme (see the next page) you will see the usage of sharps, flats, naturals and music-wide sharps. It uses the same music-wide F^{\sharp} as Happy birthday.

To better help learn the position of these notes there is an empty tablature staff added. You can fill this staff with the correct tabs to help you learn.

After that there is the song "He's a pirate" from the "Pirates of the Caribbean" movies. This song doesn't introduce any new notes and is here purely for review.

Hedwig's Theme

Harry Potter movies

Music: John Williams
Arranged: Enzo Evers

$\text{♩} = 180$

1

A
B

11

11

21

21

31

31

He's a pirate

Pirates of the Caribbean

Music: Klaus Badelt, Hans Zimmer
Arranged: Enzo Evers

BPM = 210 Start quiet and build up volume

7

14

21

The orchestra's sound goes up in pitch.
We stay stay the same pitch.

28

35

43

51

59

67

2

76

A musical score page showing two staves of music. The top staff begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one flat, and a 'C' time signature. It contains measures 76 through 80, ending with a repeat sign. Measure 76 has eighth-note pairs. Measures 77-79 show various note patterns including eighth-note pairs and sixteenth-note groups. Measure 80 ends with a repeat sign. The bottom staff begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one flat, and a 'C' time signature. It contains measures 81 through 84. Measure 81 has eighth-note pairs. Measures 82-83 show eighth-note pairs. Measure 84 ends with a double bar line.

The following song introduces two new high notes. The high E and F (see 4.20). Note that in Figure 4.21 all F notes become an F♯ due to the sharps at the start of the song.



Figure 4.20: Position of the high E, F, and F♯ notes

The notes here play the singing/melody line. Therefore the chords are placed above the notes to make it easier for two people to play together. One plays the chords, the other the melody. But don't worry about the chords yet. We come to that in the next chapter. The complete song will be learned later on in the book.

Just like with the other songs. Feel free to fill in the tabs to help you learn the notes.

C'est La Vie (intro + chorus melody)

Chef'Special
Music: Chef'Special
Arranged: Enzo Evers

Figure 4.21: C'est La Vie - Chef'Special

5 Scaled and chords

5.1 Scales

A scale is a collection of notes in ascending order between a note and its octave. The two main scales are the major (happy sound) and minor (sad sound) scale.

When describing scales, often the terms "whole" (w) and "half" (h) steps are used. Sometimes you will also see the terms "tone" (T) and "semitone" (S). Moving up a half step on the ukulele means moving to the next fret (towards the body). Moving up a whole step is the same as two half steps.

Lets look at the intervals again (Table 5.1). Going one step to the left or to the right is a half step interval. To take a whole step, simply take two half steps.

A	A \sharp	B	C	C \sharp	D	D \sharp	E	F	F \sharp	G	G \sharp
A	B \flat	B	C	D \flat	D	E \flat	E	F	G \flat	G	A \flat

Table 5.1: Sharp and flat intervals. Each step to the left or right is a half step.

5.1.1 The major scale

As mentioned. The most common scales are the major and minor scales. A lot of music theory is based on the major diatonic scale. A diatonic scale means that it has 7 different notes in the scale where each letter only occurs once. So the major diatonic scale is the first one we will learn.

Each scale has a formula. For the major diatonic scale the formula is shown in (Table 5.2). On the top you see the steps between each note (the formula itself). The numbers indicate the index of the note in the scale. Index 1 and 8 are the same note. But index 8 is one octave higher than index 1.

W	W	H	W	W	W	H	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8

Table 5.2: Major scale intervals

Note that Table 5.1 has 12 different notes/pitches. Now count the total amount of half steps that are shown in Table 5.2 (a whole step is two half steps). Indeed, there are 12 half steps to go from the note at index 1 to the same note one octave higher (index 8).

To create the C major scale we will start on the C and then simply follow the formula.

W	W	H	W	W	W	H	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8

Table 5.3: C major scale

The G major scale is shown below in (Table 5.4).

	W	W	H	W	W	W	H
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
G	A	B	C	D	E	F♯	G

Table 5.4: G major scale

In Table 5.5 you see the major scales of all the natural notes. You don't need to remember these by heart at the moment. You do need to learn the formula of the major scale by heart. There are three things to note:

1. Each scale only has unique letters. Therefore the 4th note in the F major scale is a B♭ and not an A♯.
2. The 5th note in the scale is the start of the scale on the next row. Of course, this is because they are listed as such now. But it is the basis of the "circle of fifths" which we will learn more about later.
3. Each scale below another in this list has one more ♯ than the previous. And the notes that have a sharp in one scale, also have sharp in the scales below it. Again, this has to do with the "circle of fifths".

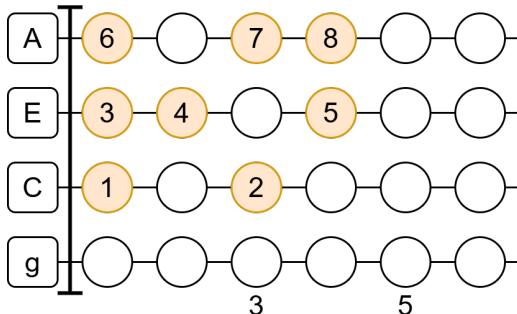
	W	W	H	W	W	W	H
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
F	G	A	B♭	C	D	E	F
C	D	E	F	G	A	B	C
G	A	B	C	D	E	F♯	G
D	E	F♯	G	A	B	C♯	D
A	B	C♯	D	E	F♯	G♯	A
E	F♯	G♯	A	B	C♯	D♯	E
B	C♯	D♯	E	F♯	G♯	A♯	B

Table 5.5: Major scales of all natural notes

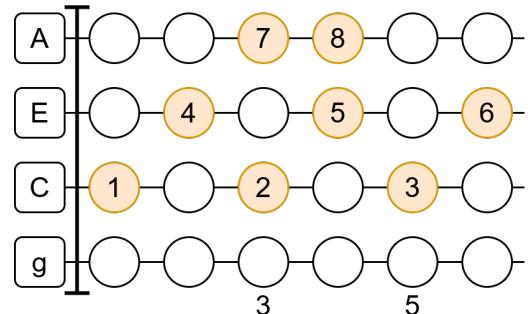
In Figure 5.1 different shapes are shown on how the major scale can be played. These shapes can be moved up and down the fretboard, as long as the distance between the frets stay the same. Shape Figure 5.1c can even be moved up and down the strings. By moving the shape, you will play a different major scale. The scale that you are playing is determined by the root note (the "1" note). In this example we are therefore playing the C# major scale.

There are other "shapes" to play the major scale as well, but these shapes don't start or the root (1) note. We will come back to those later.

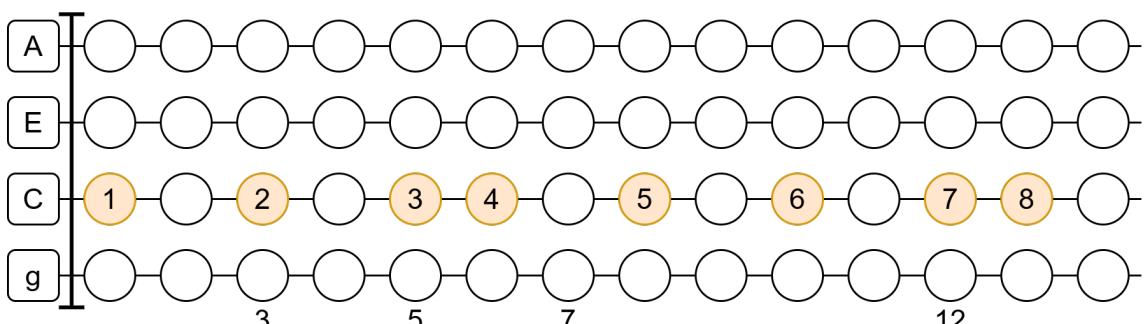
Learning these shapes by heart makes it easy to improvise over a song. But more important is to see how these shapes relate to the intervals of the major scale. The easiest shape for this is Figure 5.1c. With this shape you can easily recognize the major diatonic scale formula (w-w-h-w-w-w-h). All shapes have the same notes, just played on a different position on the fretboard.



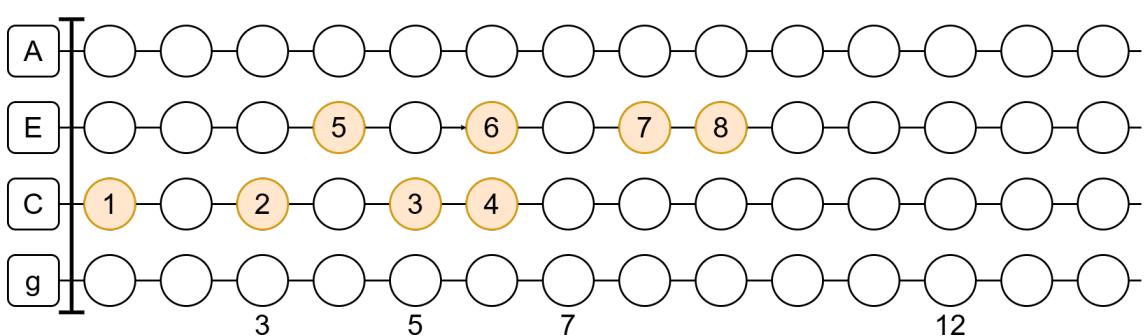
(a) Major scale on the fretboard (shape 1)



(b) Major scale on the fretboard (shape 2)



(c) Major scale on the fretboard on a single string



(d) Major scale on the fretboard on two strings starting from the C string

Figure 5.1: Major scale on the fretboard

Of course, you don't have to start on the C string. You can also start on the E string. Then the two-string shape would look like Figure 5.2. Here we are playing an F major scale.

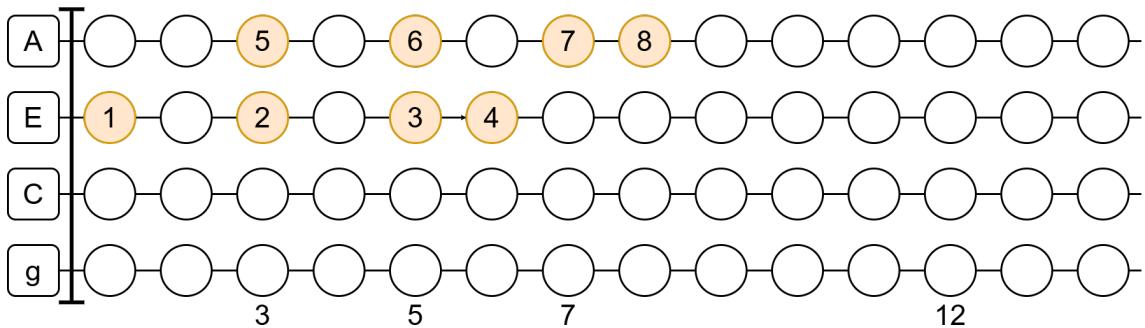


Figure 5.2: Major scale on the fretboard on two strings starting from the E string

Now that we've seen a lot of different ways to play the major scale, we will start focusing on the most compact shape. The shape shown in Figure 5.1a.

Exercise

In Appendix A you see some empty ukulele fretboards. Try to fill these with the different major scales (A, B, C, D, E, F, G) that we've seen in Table 5.5. Write the note names instead of the numbers 1-8. Use the shape from Figure 5.1a. You can of course print out the empty ukulele fretboard diagram as often as you want.

While doing this exercise, don't forget to play the scales on the ukulele as well.

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Appendices

A Empty ukulele fretboard

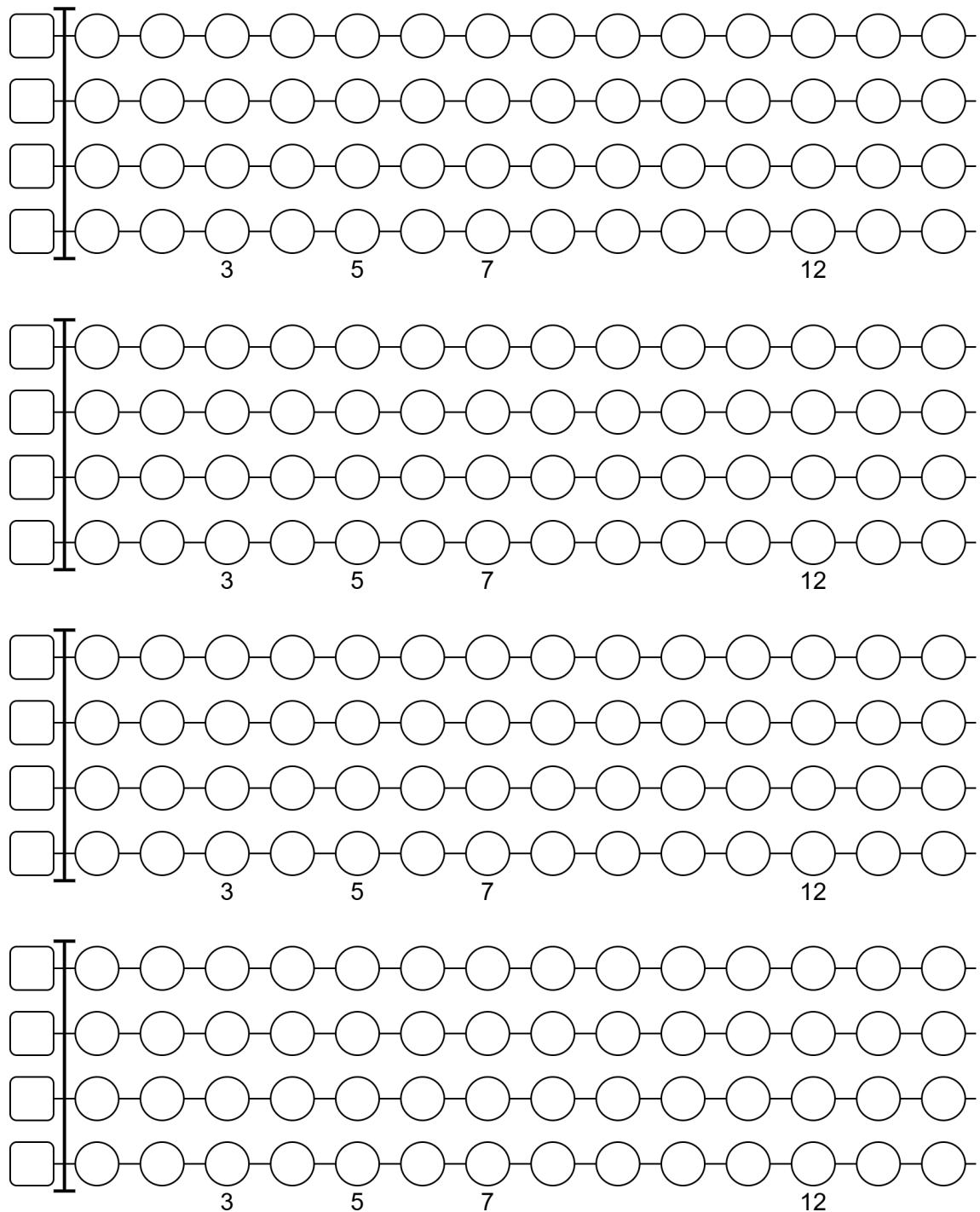


Figure A.1: Empty ukulele fretboard