

Dynamic Guitar Technique Part I

Chord Exercises

©2004 David Raleigh Arnold

Please see the end of this document for restrictions.

1 Introduction

Giuliani, Carcassi, Carulli, and others wrote some material of marginal value which they called “arpeggios”. In theory it is a way of working on left hand chords and right hand patterns at the same time. In fact, it is not an effective way of working on either beyond a rudimentary level. The right hand is not challenged because a given finger always plays the same string, and all the left hand does is hurt except for rare instants of motion.

Three note chords are infinitely better than four note chords for practice, because one finger is always off the fretboard so the exercise does not beat up the ends of your fingers nearly so much, and because you can attain enough speed so that right-left coordination becomes a factor. With speed you get not only the sort of benefit that you expect from chord practice but also some of the same sort of fine tuning that you get from arpeggios and scales.

The first chord drill is completely written out so you can see how the others are to be done. The rest have only the bouts where the primary inversion changes and of course the fingerings with it.

When you are playing the first three strings, the thumb is laid down on the last three strings. In other cases the thumb is as close as you can get to that state while still getting good sound.

2 Major Chords

2.1 Major, on the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Strings. Play with i, m, and a.

The image displays four staves of musical notation for guitar chord exercises. Each staff begins with a treble clef and a 3/4 time signature. The first staff starts at measure 1 and ends at measure 8. The second staff starts at measure 4 and ends at measure 8. The third staff starts at measure 7 and ends at measure 8. The fourth staff starts at measure 10 and ends at measure 8. The notation consists of chords on the first three strings (E, A, D) with various fingerings (1, 2, 3) and accidentals (sharps, flats) indicated above the notes. The exercises are designed to be played with the thumb on the last three strings.

Chords are extremely important practice for all guitar players. They strengthen the left hand and add greatly to its efficiency while very much improving the ability to get up and down the neck. Some of these fingerings may seem impossible at first, but it is a fact that anything you can get at all you can get in a hurry, given the practice. It will be necessary at times to move the left elbow away from the body so that the small finger may be extended by opening the hand rather than closing it. That is to be able to extend the other, longer fingers by closing the hand rather than opening it.

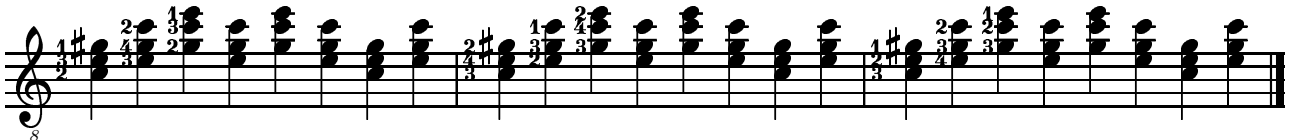
4.3 Diminished, on the 3rd, 4th and 5th Strings. Play with t, i, and m.



5 Augmented Chords

The augmented chords are by far the easiest, so it would make sense to begin with them. Because there is no sliding, fewer fingerings are possible for the last exercise.

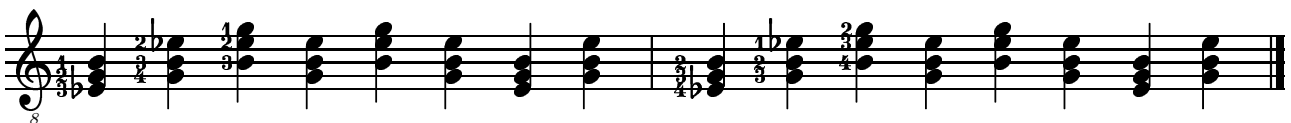
5.1 Augmented, on the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Strings. Play with i, m, and a.



5.2 Augmented, on the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th Strings. Play with t, m, and a.



5.3 Augmented, on the 3rd, 4th and 5th Strings. Play with t, i, and m.



6 Afterword

These fingerings are ones which you actually use. The qualification is that you would never use some of them independently, but rather as part of something else, but that enhances rather than diminishes their usefulness. Unlike the arpeggios, the fingerings are arbitrary, but they are not capricious:

- The hardest fingerings are used the most.
- There is no sliding, except over one fret. In long shifts, slides beat up the fingers too much to be a good idea in an exercise.
- There is variation to prevent the formation of specific fingering habits.
- Every left hand finger is used for every bout. No one finger is overused, I hope.

It is futile to give technique to students who are not ready to get fast improvement from it. The first exercises should be ones that give quick encouragement. For a student first starting on serious technique, this chord practice should be the beginning. Chords give the quickest results, then arpeggios, then scales. That is not an evaluation, it's a schedule. Chords are equal to arpeggios in importance. Scales are more important than either.

If you work hard on these, I promise miracles. It is possible to perform this whole routine in less than ten minutes. You will greatly enjoy the results, however far you take it.¹

¹Feel free to use this document in unaltered form. This document is entirely original work. The author claims copyright to any recordings of these exercises or midi versions or tablature which may accompany this document. This document was produced using GNU software, especially the incomparable LilyPond typesetting program. The possession of this document does not confer on the bearer any rights at all. For any payment for copies of this document, you will remit to Amnesty International \$1.00 US or 50% of the sale price, whichever is larger, for each copy sold. That offer may apply only to the latest version of this document, and is rescinded for older versions of this document, which may not be distributed. That offer may be rescinded at any time at the author's pleasure. dra@openguitar.com