

Why Scales are Important and some Methods of Learning

The Importance of Scales in Music Education.

If you look at any music with a more analytical eye, you will be able to identify a raft of scale patterns, arpeggios and either ascending or descending scale runs. When the tempo of the music is at a fairly quick pace, these can become quite a challenge to play correctly, and with musicality. This becomes difficult because you are trying to read each and every note, transfer that knowledge from your brain to your fingers, move your fingers correctly and maintain the feel of the music all at the same time. By having a good understanding of both the scales and the arpeggios, along with a good technique in the movement of your fingers, you can react more quickly, more accurately and accomplish far more in the development of your musical capability.

Scales and arpeggios should become second nature, a little like riding a bicycle really. The technique should be firmly embedded in your brain so that you hardly have to think about them, then your fingers do all the work automatically. Students rarely seem to enjoy playing scales, but there are so many ways to change the focus of playing scales to a more technical approach. The might be achieved, perhaps, by changing the rhythms or making up some scale patterns so that they are more of a study piece of music, rather than a straight forward scale. Try to identify for yourself some scale and / or arpeggios in the music that you have in your collection, or think about popular tunes that you know and how they might follow this kind of pattern. Here are some possible examples: -

- Mozart – Twinkle Twinkle Little Star
- Theme tune to Eastenders
- Frere Jacques
- Mozart Clarinet Quintet or Concerto
- Big Band Jazz – In The Mood

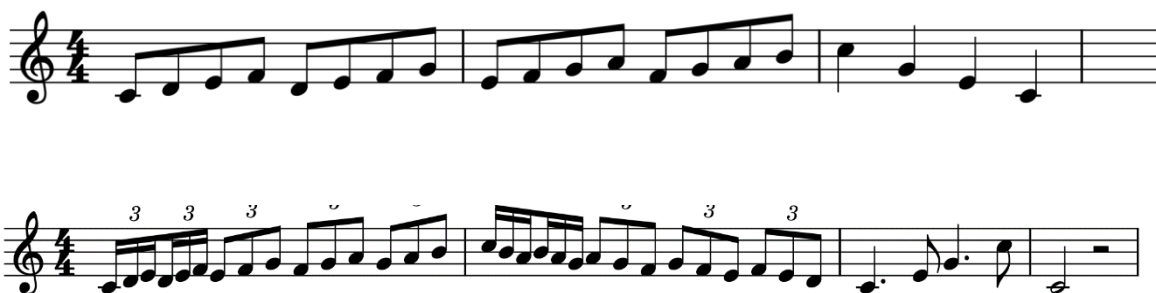
You will find these types of patterns in all genres of music dating back from the earliest music that you can find to the more popular styles produced today. When you take a more critical approach to music and analyse the structures used, these types of patterns will start jumping out at you and the importance of learning your scales and arpeggios will be evident.

Methods of Learning Scales and Arpeggios

Once you have the basis of the scale or arpeggio in your mind and you can play them fairly evenly or straight, you could take a more rhythmical approach. Rather than playing them evenly or straight, you could choose a variety of musical styles like Latin or Jazz and play them with that kind of feel. You could take a more technical approach and play them with a variety of tonguing techniques that you may be learning either in a piece of music or for some kind of study practice. Another option is to practice your note groupings and play them in triplets, a very clear 4 or perhaps in 6's.

You could make up some of your own studies, playing the scales in short runs, going up on scales and down on arpeggios then change that around.





By creating some of your own ideas it doesn't only help with your playing ability, but will start to improve your own creative mind for becoming a composer in your own right.

Once you have created some interesting patterns, developed in a variety of tempo's, styles and timings (i.e. 6/8; 12/8; 2/4; 4/4 etc), you can then play your rhythmic patterns in any key or scale that you need to learn.

Although there are a large number of books available with scales in them, for instruments like the Clarinet or Saxophone you probably don't really need to spend your money on them. If you think of a scale as a melody, the sound of the melody doesn't change regardless of which key you are playing it in. For example, a major scale's melody will sound the same in C major, A major or Bb major. The only changes you are making is where the scale starts and where to change the notes to either a sharp or a flat. The same applies for minor scales regardless of them being a harmonic minor or a melodic minor. At this point it is worth noting that some instruments, for example a piano, often does require a scale book because you have to learn specific fingering for each scale.

Summary

Scales are very important to everyone's musical education. Learning techniques to play them well without having to think too hard how to play them, and being able to play them at pace will enhance your musical capability. To have the ability to spot scales, arpeggios and scale patterns in music quickly will call on your sub-conscious knowledge of everything that you have learnt and your fingers will start to operate with some automation and technical precision.

Make scales and arpeggios fun to learn, create your own patterns and rhythms. Analyse your music and find these patterns, pencil in the names of the scales or arpeggios so that when you get to them in your music you instantly know that you are about to play an Ab arpeggio or a D major scale.

Scales and arpeggios can be fun to play because you are playing them all the time in the music that you enjoy playing every day.