

THE ULTIMATE PIANO WORKOUT

INTRODUCTION

I created this book in answer to the many requests that I receive from people around the world saying that they want to be able to play the piano like me. I have replied to emails on a daily basis advising people to learn and master their scales & arpeggios, and I have written blog posts about the subject. I even devoted a chapter about the importance of these exercises in my book "Secrets To Better Piano Playing".

After a while, it was clear that many people weren't quite sure where to begin, and I received more questions about which book of scales to purchase, as well as which one was better. People wanted to know which scales to learn first, how fast to play them, the order in which to play them, how many octaves etc. I was answering questions about correct fingering, hand position, as well as offering suggestions as to how to remember which black notes were used in each scale.

There were obviously many pianists who were ready and willing to improve their technique, but lacked the necessary guidance as to how to go about it. What was needed was a clear, concise set of instructions as to what to do and how to do it, and so my work on this book has been focused on fulfilling that need.

These pages contain all of the scales and arpeggios that are necessary not only to develop an excellent piano technique, but also to develop an understanding of how western music is constructed. The exercises contained here are essential for pianists of all ages and levels, regardless of the style of music they prefer to play, and all great pianists of the last few centuries, without exception, mastered every exercise contained within these pages.

YOU NEED SCALES AND ARPEGGIOS

To become a great pianist takes time and dedication. There are no shortcuts or magic formulas to make it happen more quickly despite the claims of many charlatans on the internet. Advertisements stating that you don't need scales and arpeggios, and that they are boring and tedious are completely false.

I can assure you that scales and arpeggios are absolutely necessary, and I attribute my own piano technique solely to the careful and diligent study of them. Thousands of great pianists and composers over the last several centuries would have agreed.

When pianists know their scales well, there is nothing boring or tedious about playing them, however, many have struggled during the learning process, which unfortunately cast these essential exercises in a negative light. Many students were never shown a clear and concise way of working on scales, and often gave up on them after learning only a few.

Mastering scales and arpeggios does not involve pain and suffering if you work on them carefully and in the correct way for a short amount of time every day. Time spent on these exercises will pay dividends later on.

Scales and arpeggios are not the *only* way to improve your technique, but I believe them to be the best way. Exercises by Czerny and Hanon as well as others, can be useful in developing agility, strength and stamina, but the same benefits can be obtained with scales alone, **plus** there is the added benefit of learning all of the major and minor keys, which cannot be said for the aforementioned exercises.

WHY SCALES AND ARPEGGIOS ARE SO IMPORTANT

We can trace the origins of scales back to ancient Greece, and in fact the very word **scale** is Greek, which means **ladder**.

The lining up of a series of pitches, as if on a ladder, creates some interesting mathematical possibilities, and we know how the ancient Greeks loved their mathematics! Pythagorus is often considered the grandfather of music because of his experiments with vibrating strings and pitches. During his time, the idea of the octave (eight notes) was developed, which still has a vital impact on the music of today.

If eight white notes (an octave) are played in succession on the piano, such as C D E F G A B C, the result sounds slightly different when beginning on a different note such as F G A B C D E F. The reason for this is that the construction, or pattern of whole steps and half steps (tones and semitones) is different depending upon where you begin. Musicians of the past spent much time studying the construction and patterns of sequences of notes (scales).

During medieval times, monks developed what we now call the seven "church modes" which were in fact an early form of scales, each with their own Greek name. These scales were not intended to be played, but instead were thought of as "templates" upon which music could be constructed.

A good way to think about this is like the game Scrabble, where a player has a certain amount of letters with which he/she must create a word. In music, the early modes were used to construct melodies as long as one adhered to only the notes contained in that particular mode, just as with letters in the game of Scrabble.

Dorian mode for example, consisted of the notes D E F G A B C D and as long as a composer used only those notes, in whichever order he pleased, the resulting music was considered to be in Dorian mode. Because it was based on a 'template' that was considered strong, the resulting music worked, and was considered pleasing.

Some of the modes sounded better than others (for reasons that I won't bore you with here), and of the seven modes, two became the most popular - Ionian and Aeolian, which today we call the major scale and the minor scale.

Music of the western world is almost always constructed using these two forms of scale. Various eastern countries developed their own scales, so the classical music of India and China for example, is based upon a different system entirely.

Experiments have been made in western music to combine scales and even create music that does not use any particular scale, but this music has never become popular due to its unusual sound.

There are twelve major scales - one for each of the black and white notes contained within an octave, and likewise, there are twelve minor scales making a total of twenty four. Your favorite song or piece of music, regardless of style, is almost without exception, built upon one of these twenty four scales.

Music can be loosely grouped into two main categories - music in minor keys which tends to sound serious, and music in major keys which does not. A film composer who is scoring for a sad scene will tend to write music based upon one of the twelve minor scales. If he/she chooses a major scale instead, the result will sound more comedic because the sound wouldn't fit the mood - a technique that is often used successfully in movie and television comedies.

A piece of music in the key of E major uses the notes of the scale of E major. Although the music can use extra notes that are not included, the majority of the notes *will* in fact be from the scale. A pianist who is completely familiar with the scale of E major as well as all of its variations, will be able to more successfully sight-read a piece of music in E major, as well as have fewer technical challenges owing to being so familiar with most of the patterns that can be used in the key of E major.

Much of what I've just explained is about music history, theory and composition, so how does this help with your piano technique?

Having a solid piano technique means that you have great agility, speed, strength and stamina. This is accomplished through the constant repetition of various sequences of notes. There are no better sequences of notes than the very patterns upon which music is built. Time spent on Czerny or Hanon exercises will strengthen and develop your fingers, but time spent on just three different scales is far more beneficial for you as a pianist.

Your work on scales accomplishes two things - the ability to have complete control over your fingers (and therefore the piano keys), as well as the development of a better understanding of what is involved in the music that you are playing.

Knowledge and mastery of the twenty four scales will arm you not only with a stronger technique, but the ability to identify and understand written music so that you can learn it more quickly and easily, and it will also give you the ability to improvise and compose your own music.

Another extremely important benefit of playing scales is correct fingering. All too often, a student's sloppy performance can be attributed directly to incorrect fingering. Wrong fingers cause gaps in legato passages, as well as hesitations and bad timing because of the awkwardness in approaching correct notes in time. Mastery of scales takes much of the guesswork out of which fingers are used in a piece of music, because depending upon the key, the knowledge of the associated scale will already dictate which fingers should be placed upon which keys.

I mentioned earlier that there are no magic formulas, however if one really did exist, then it would be this system of major and minor keys that is used in all of the music that we listen to. Mastery of this system is the key to unlocking the glorious secrets of that which we called music.

Unfortunately, most pianists either never learned this system in the first place, gave up trying, or convinced themselves that it just wasn't necessary. I hope you can now see why indeed it is not only necessary, but vital for all pianists.

YOUR TASK AHEAD

Your task in learning the scales and arpeggios in this book is not quite as difficult as you may think. Yes, I know the book looks daunting and a little scary, but there is not as much here as you might imagine.

Your most important job is to learn all twelve major scales and all twelve minor scales fluently.

This means that you have twenty four exercises to learn, and then much of the rest of the book is simply a variation of those twenty four exercises.

The major scales and minor scales are related to one another. Once you understand and recognize their relationship, you will see that you are only learning twelve scales plus a variation of each.

The major scale consists of a specific pattern of half steps and whole steps, that when memorized, will allow you to figure out the notes for any major scale beginning on any note.

A half step is one note to the very next, whether black or white. C to C# is a half step.

A whole step is two half steps such as C to D. There is always a note in between a whole step.

The pattern of a major scale is: whole step - whole step - half step - whole step - whole step - whole step - half step

Commit the following to memory: Whole, Whole, Half, Whole, Whole, Whole, Half

Apply this pattern of whole steps and half steps to any starting note on the keyboard and you will have discovered which notes are used in that major scale. For some people, this may be quicker and easier than reading the notes, but is useful for anyone who finds themselves 'stuck' with a particular scale.

You will learn the major and minor scales in pairs - the major scale and its associated relative minor. This will not only save time and make the learning process easier, but it will also give you a greater understanding of tonality, or how the keys are related to one another.

Notes played a third apart sound good, and likewise, notes played a sixth, an octave or a tenth apart sound good also. Composers use passages played in thirds, sixths, octaves and tenths all the time, so once you have learned your major and minor scales, you will then play them a third apart, a sixth apart and a tenth apart. (You are already playing them an octave apart to begin with).

You should realize that this simply means that one of your hands will begin on a different note. The actual notes and fingerings are the same, so this is not like learning a whole new set of scales. It is simply a variation - albeit an important one, of what you already know.

Broken chords and arpeggios consist of the first, third and fifth notes of a scale. For example, the arpeggio of C major consists of the notes C E G which are played over and over. The notes C E and G are the first, third and fifth notes of the scale of C major.

Broken chords and arpeggios are much easier to learn and remember than scales because they consist of only three notes rather than the seven notes of a scale. (Remember that a scale consists of seven *different* notes, although you actually play eight notes in an octave. The top note is a repeat of the bottom note).

There are recognizable patterns in broken chords and arpeggios which will help you to learn them more quickly, but they will already be easier to learn once you know your scales.

There are three forms of the minor scale which I will explain shortly. All three forms are closely related to one another, so once you know one of them, it's simply a matter of altering one note to create one of the other forms.

Dominant sevenths, diminished sevenths and augmented triads are variations of the standard arpeggio. Once you know how to make an adjustment to the arpeggios that you already know, then playing these variations is much easier than you may think.

Chromatic scales are very different from everything mentioned so far. A chromatic scale is not in any particular key because it uses all twelve notes of the octave. This makes them easier to learn because one does not have to consider which notes to play because they're all played. Additionally, once a chromatic scale is learned on any particular note, it will always be played in the same way regardless of its starting note. In other words, you'll only ever need to learn one of these (as well as its variations).

Finally, you will learn the whole tone scale which is considered very new in the world of scales, even though it has been around since the beginning of the twentieth century. Once you have learned it on the notes C and B, the pattern is the same for any other starting note. You will only need to learn these two as well as their variations.

There is an exercise at the end of the book that I found to be indispensable to good technique and that's why I included it here. The exercise was taught to my mother Thelma (my piano teacher) by her teacher, York Bowen. York Bowen was a wonderful pianist and composer who taught at the Royal Academy of Music in London, and he was once praised by the brilliant French composer Saint-Saëns as being the greatest living English composer. That was quite a compliment from one of the greatest composers who has ever lived!

Mr. Bowen gave my mother this exercise to develop independence of fingers, and he went on to tell her that it was the only exercise that she'd ever need. I have taught this exercise to students for years, and always referred to it as the "horrible exercise". As far as I know, this is the first time that it has ever been written down in music notation, so I felt that it was fitting to name it after York Bowen. If you only learn one thing from this book, then it should be his exercise, but I warn you, it will be a challenge.

You may have to go back and re-read this section, but I hope that you now have an understanding of the fact that almost everything in the book is a variation of the twelve major scales, and that your task is not quite as daunting as you first thought. It's all about *how* you look at it.