

WHAT LIES BENEATH: A REVIEW OF CHORD PATTERNS AND VARIATIONS



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In the last issue, we "toured" the guitar with a G chord to illustrate the versatility and variations available in chord sounds and fingering up and down the neck. What was presented in that lesson can be generalized to other keys and other instruments. While you are learning to play your chosen musical instrument you will be acquiring the knowledge of those things that are peculiar to a particular key or to a specific instrument alone. As you practice, you will also become aware of those things that apply to all of music in general and, hence, to many other keys and instruments as well. This knowledge will supercharge your learning skills, move you past many of the barriers faced by other students, put your progress on fast-forward and keep your interest level up where it belongs. In other words, you're learning and having fun. And, music should be fun!

With what you already know from previous lessons (available at www.folkWorks.org) you should be able to pick up a guitar and find a "G chord" just about anywhere you please on the instrument. Since you know that a G chord is made up of the notes G, B and D and that the guitar's open strings are E-A-D-G-B-E you can then draw a map (see Figure 7) to find every G-B-D grouping anywhere on the guitar. More importantly, you have gathered the general knowledge that this G-B-D grouping from a G major scale represents the 1-3-5 major chord structure for any major scale. That gives you portable knowledge that is applicable to major chords of any key on the guitar. Figures 1 through 7 are some examples of this.

Looking at the left side of Figure 1 near the beginning of the guitar neck, notice the patterns and how you can see familiar chord shapes at various positions along the neck. Notice also that the entire pattern repeats itself as you move past the octave at the twelfth fret. Look at Figure 2 and beyond and you will see that the overall pattern remains the same but gets promoted up the neck. It is much like a slide rule: you visualize the pattern and move it up or down the neck until you are in the proper key. So, remember—what you know about one particular chord can be applied to all other chords when shifted to the proper location along the neck.

So far we have applied all of this chord magic just to the guitar fret board, but other stringed instruments are also fair game. Pick up a mandolin, for example, and try to figure out several variations of a D major chord. Once we know that the mandolin strings are tuned to G-D-A-E (from lowest to highest) and remembering that the 1-3-5 major chord grouping for D major is D-F#-A we can produce Figure 8 which maps out all of the D's, F#'s and A's on the mandolin. Any comfortable grouping of the notes from Figure 8 will produce a D major chord on the mandolin. Just as an aside -- the fiddle/violin is tuned the same as a mandolin and, even though it has no frets and is not usually thought of as a chording instrument, visualizing the chords laid out on the fiddle will make learning it a lot easier.

Once again we get a glimpse of the sameness that lies hidden behind the music that at first appears to be so varied and different. The more you can see the underlying patterns in any body of knowledge, the faster and more vital will be the learning experience. So keep looking for the magic in all things and, of course, stay tuned....

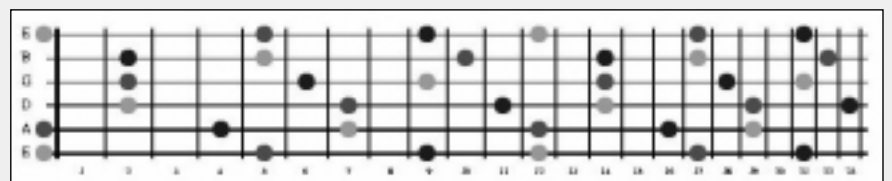


Figure 1 - Guitar - A Major Chord

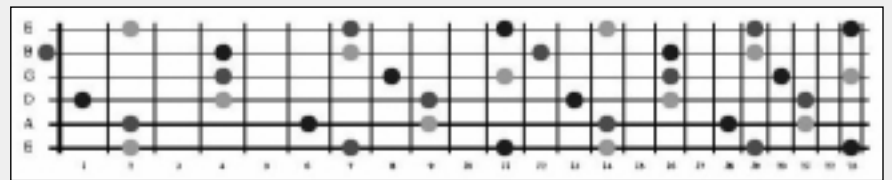


Figure 2 - Guitar - B Major Chord

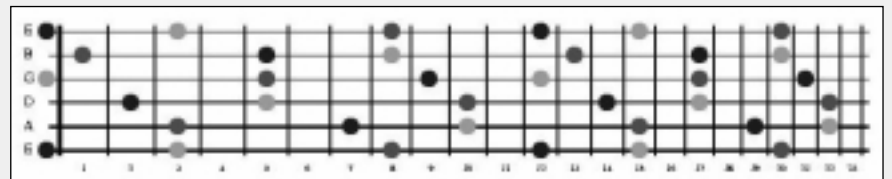


Figure 3 - Guitar - C Major Chord

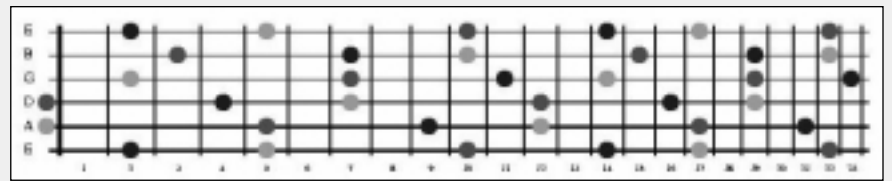


Figure 4 - Guitar - D Major Chord

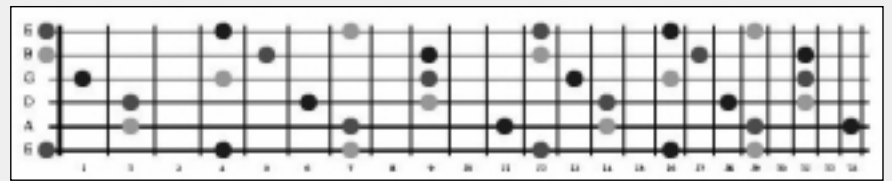


Figure 5 - Guitar - E Major Chord

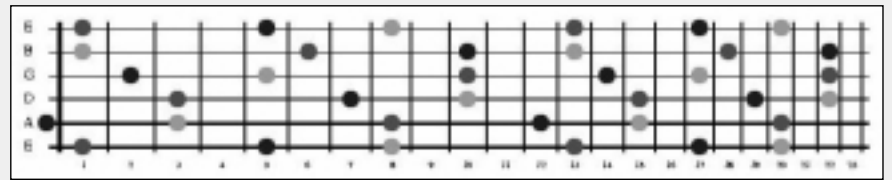


Figure 6 - Guitar - F Major Chord

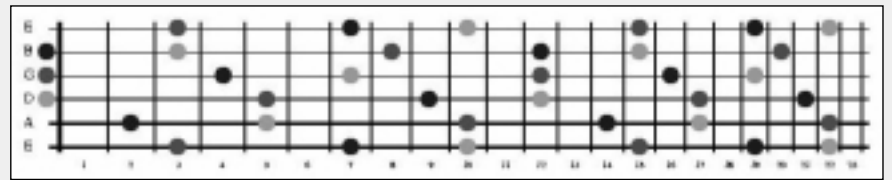


Figure 7 - Guitar - G Major Chord

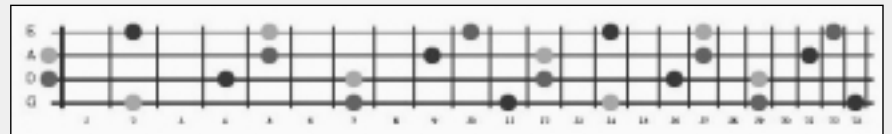


Figure 8 - Mandolin/Violin - D Major Chord

Graphics generated at <http://www.power-chord.com/gaff>.

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keep the tradition alive and to someday pass it on. At the same time I'm blending these different styles into my own. That's one of the many areas Bobby has helped me with.

G: Well yes, in many ways we're all just the sum total of all the influences in our lives.

J: Yes. And I've studied with each of these guys for years, and I don't stop seeing them. We have friendships, we know each others families. You don't just learn old-time fiddle music from them, but you learn about the hardships in their lives, and the good times. And just about every tune that you learn from them, there's a story that goes along with it. There's a memory from when they learned it, and what was going on at that time.

G: Well, I think it's really exciting that you're carrying on the tradition. We need more people of your generation getting involved.

J: Well there aren't many.

G: Go tell your friends to start practicing!

J: Well my friends all know what I do. When we were younger they didn't quite understand what it was. In Indiana it was a big deal. But here, everyone says, "Well, my uncle and my dad and my grandfather all play" so it's no big thing. And I like that, I don't want anyone making a big fuss about my playing fiddle. My friends all say, "Jake, we love your music, and we'll go out and buy your CDs, but nobody else's. We like it as long as you're playing it." And they're all starting to understand my ties to this music. They've pretty much stopped asking me why I don't play sports.

Gaili Schoen plays old-time music with her band Turtle Creek in Southern California, and composes music for film. You can see her latest film **Festival in Cannes** now in theaters nationwide, or check out her website at www.gailischoen.com.