How To Play...

Ukulele Chord Progressions

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How To Play Ukulele Chord Progressions

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Introduction

Like many teenage boys with dreams of superstardom and living the rock and roll lifestyle, I was in a band. We had great times together knocking out cover songs and working on our own material.

The downside was that only one of the five of us had any musical talent (he was also the one all the girls fell in love with, but that's for another book).

Dan had all the talent and he was incredible. The rest of us were in awe of what he could do.

We would spend hours trying to work out the chord sequence to a song and he'd have it all figured out before the song was over.

He knew whether a chord was going to be major or minor. He sometimes seemed to know which chord was going to be next before he'd even heard it.

We decided he was some sort of musical psychic; communicating with the songwriter through some dark, satanic art.

Not only that, he also wrote unbelievably good songs. He could sit down, pick up a guitar and strum out a gorgeous chord progression at will. His progressions would sing out so strongly that writing a melody to go along with it was practically a formality. His progressions had twists and turns, light and shade, they were a complete journey in themselves.

He used exotic chords that we didn't even know existed but he made them sound perfectly natural.

The rest of us were reduced to clanking out chords half stolen from our favourite songs while it seemed to come completely naturally to him. We were jealous of his God-given talent.

When we were 16, much to our dismay, his parents sold their house and they moved away. The band disintegrated and I didn't see him again for another couple of years.

We stayed in touch and eventually I went down to visit him for a weekend in the big city. We hung out and chatted about the old band days. I told him how jealous we had all been of his natural ability; how we wished we were lucky enough to be as musically gifted as he was. He giggled at me.

He told me it wasn't talent or luck. He knew something we didn't: music theory.

Back then, I was very snooty about music theory. It was only good writing classical music; it was for swots; it killed off natural musical instincts; it was too complicated; it just wasn't rock and roll.

Dan made me see how wrong I was.

He explained to me how music theory can unlock your creativity; massively increase your musical landscape; help you transfer the sounds in your head onto your instrument; how it awakens you to the sounds you can create; how it lets you learn how to use a chord or series of chords to set a mood and create emotions in the listener.

When he said this to me, I told myself, "You have to get yourself a musical education."

And that's exactly what I did. I found that it wasn't as difficult to grasp as I had thought. Once I understood the basics, everything just fell into place. I could see how it works

When you learn the theory, you can hear it everywhere. You can see the little chord tricks that songwriters are using. I started to use the same tricks that Dan had used to impress us years before.

Unbelievably, some people even began to think I had a natural musical talent (anyone hearing me in the school band could have set them straight about that).

These ideas inspired me and I hope they inspire you too.

How To Use This Book

This book is intended to be taken in bite size chunks.

Depending on how familiar you are with music theory already, reading the whole thing at once will be overwhelming. There are too many ideas, techniques and tricks to be taken in all at once. I'd recommend you getting comfortable with an idea before you move onto the next one.

I hope that when you come across a new idea here you'll grab your uke and hear how it sounds. Maybe even use it to create a new chord progression, song or tune.

The theory isn't nearly as important as the sounds. Take your time to get to know the sounds, see which ones you like, get a feel for them. That way you'll have these sounds at your fingertips whenever you need them.

The Major Scale & Chord Building

If you want to grasp all of chord theory, you only have to learn seven notes.

Once you're familiar with these notes – when you know them forwards, backwards, up, down and all around – you'll be able to do come up with great sounding chord progressions whenever you feel like it.

These seven essential notes are those of the major scale.

The flow of the major scale is natural, easy and instantly recognisable.

Almost every tune that has become embedded in the public consciousness – whether it's a nursery rhyme, Christmas carol or national anthem – is built around it.

You can use this scale to build not just chords but entire chord progressions.

What Is The Major Scale?

The major scale is a series of seven notes with a set distance between each of them. You can build a major scale on any note but we'll start with C (since it's the lowest note on the ukulele).

C up two frets D up two frets E up one fret F up two frets G up two frets A up two frets B up one fret C

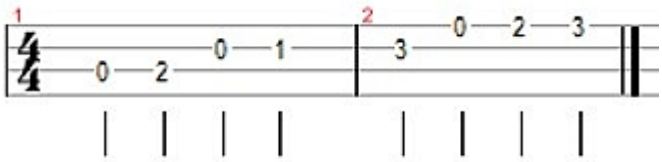
The important thing to note here is the distance between the notes: two frets, two frets, one fret, two frets, two frets, two frets, one fret (2, 2, 1, 2, 2, 2, 1).

Using these distances, you can start on any note and construct a major scale. But for now we'll stick with C.

C D E F G A B C

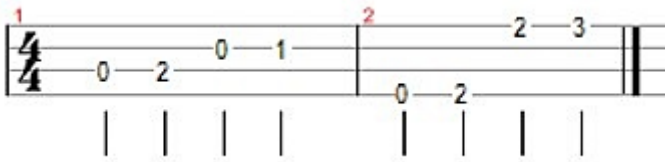
Listen to example 1 and you can immediately hear how natural the major scale feels. If you want to play through it yourself, the tab for it is:

Example 1a

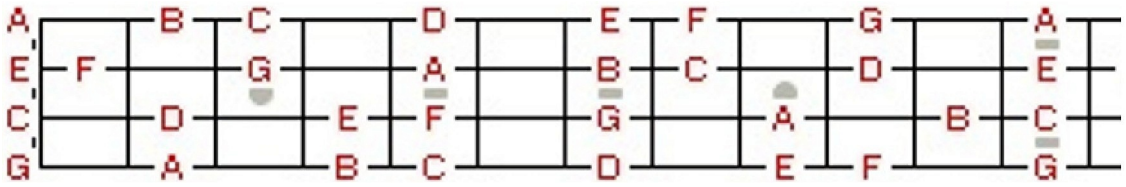


It is also well worth noting how the re-entrant G string fits into the scale:

Example 1b



This diagram shows you all the places on the fretboard that these notes occur:



The chart is how the notes look on the uke if you tilt it up towards you (it will look slightly different to left-handers - you can find left handed charts at the end of the book).

It isn't essential for you to memorize all these note positions right away, but knowing where the notes are in the first four frets will be a big advantage in putting chords together.

And there you have it. You're only seven pages in and you already know the fundamental secret of creating chord progressions. Everything from now on is just tweaking these notes.

I could just end the book right here, but I'll go on.

How Do I Make A Chord?

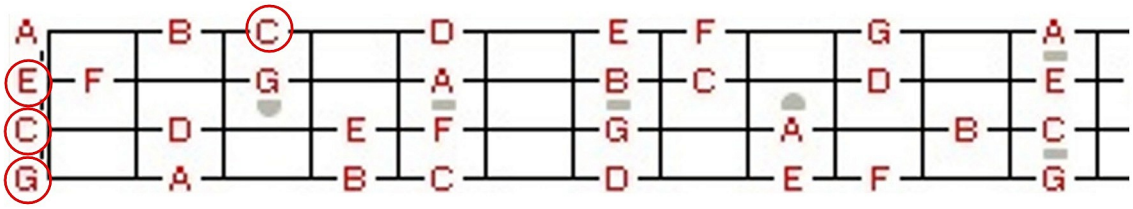
The simplest chord is the triad: a group of three notes. You can use the major scale to create a whole family of triads. The major triad is made up of the first note of the major scale, the third note and the fifth note.

So, in C:

1st		**3rd**		**5th**			
C	D	**E**	F	**G**	A	B	C
play	miss	**play**	miss	**play**			

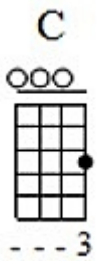
To create the first chord you go up the major scale and 'play a note, miss a note, play a note, miss a note, play a note'. That means you gather together the first, third and fifth note in the scale.

The first chord you create with the C major scale is the C major chord (usually referred to as just 'C'). The first note (also known as the root) is C, the thrid is E and the fifth is G. Now we have to find these notes on the fretboard.



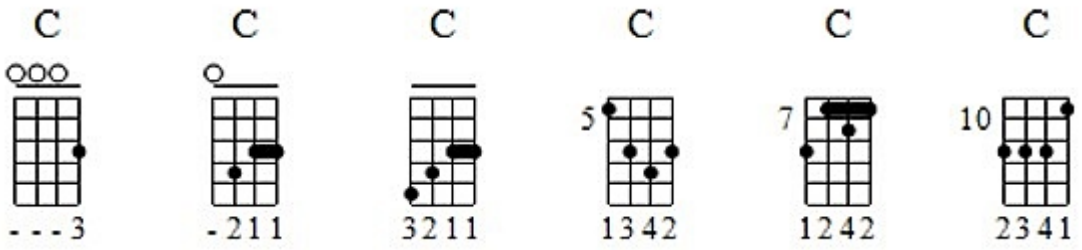
G, C and E are fairly easy to find on the ukulele - they are the bottom three open strings. Because the uke has four strings, one of the notes in the chord can be repeated. In this case it's easy to play a second C at the third fret on the A string.

This gives us the familiar C chord shape:

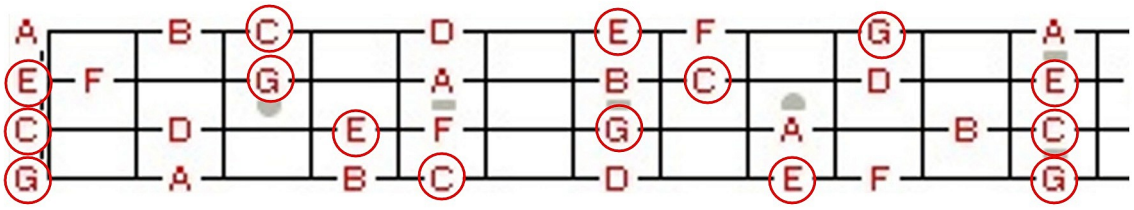


So long as you have the notes C, E and G (and only those notes) you can play them in any combination, anywhere on the neck and it will be a C chord.

For example, all these chords are C:



Every note in every one of those chords is either C, E or G. Check if you don't believe me…



See, I told you so.

There's no need to learn the chord positions all the way up the neck at this stage. But bear in mind that a single chord can be played in many different ways - what's important is the notes that it contains.

"But," I hear you cry, "you said the major scale was the key to chord progressions. That's just one chord." The major scale doesn't just contain one chord. It contains a whole family of chords and, because they all contain notes from the same scale, they sound natural and strong when you use them together in a chord progression.

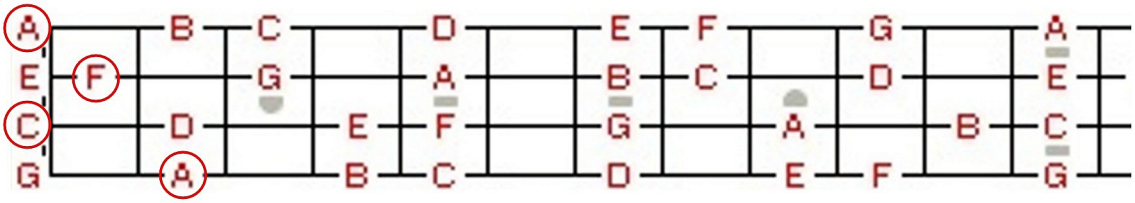
How Do I Make A Whole Bunch of Chords?

This trick is really simple. All you have to do is play the same game of 'play a note, miss a note, play a note, miss a note, play a note' starting with each note of the C major scale.

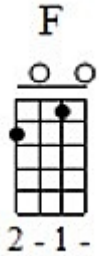
For example, starting with the F:

C	D	E	**F**	G	**A**	B	**C**
			play	miss	**play**	miss	**play**

This gives us the notes F, A and C. Now to find these notes on the uke.



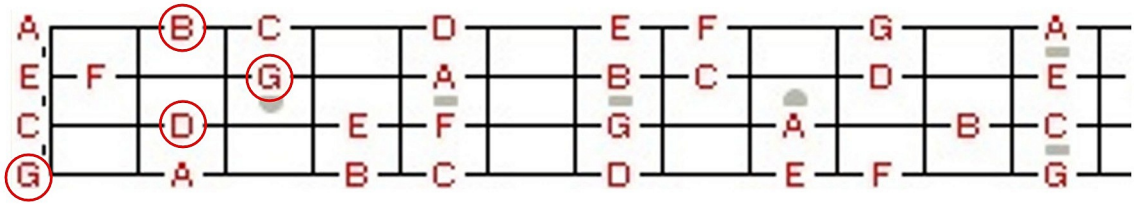
On the uke there is an F on the E string first fret; an A on the open A string and the G string second fret; and there's the open C string. This gives us the familiar F chord shape.



When you reach the end of the major scale, it goes right back to the beginning and starts again. This means the G chord is made up like this:

C	D	E	F	**G**	A	**B**	C	**D**
				play	miss	**play**	miss	**play**

On the fretboard:



In the rest of the book

- Steal The Beatles' favourite chord tricks.

- Never get stuck with that 'what chord comes next?' feeling.

- Build jazz chords using the technique you've already learned.

- Chord substitution, chord extensions and many more demystified.

- See how to put together juicy, compelling chord progressions.

- Improve your ability to learn by ear by knowing which chords will occur when.

- Spice up your chord solos.

- Contains a pdf of over 50 pages packed with ideas, progressions and diagrams and mp3 examples of chord progressions.

Click here to find out more.