Integrating Effective Scale Practice into the Suzuki Bass Method

Suzuki Association of the Americas Annual Convention
Friday, May 23, 2014, 4:10-5:00
Presenter: Paul Sharpe
University of North Carolina School of the Arts

I. When is the appropriate time to introduce scales?

a. Follow the book's plan

i. Suzuki was very methodical in the violin books

1. Introduces D and G in the first violin book
2. Hand position established well in the A major pieces (#1 Twinkle-#9 Perpetual Motion) as preparation for those pieces

ii. We introduce things in an appropriate way as well

1. Book 1 has two tonalizations
   a. In the A-B pre-book examples for perfecting 4th position, in D Major (do-mi-sol-do-re-do-sol-mi-do)
   b. In the conventional start to introduce 4th position, G major (do-mi-sol-la-sol-mi-do)
2. Book 2 introduces a G major 2 octave scale before the last three songs of book 2 (English Folk Song, Long Long Ago, and March in G)
3. Book 3 has several unique scales introduced
   a. Eb major scale introduced before Trilling Waltz, the Elephant, and Scherzo
   b. D and Eb Dorian scales are introduced, along with ascending and descending thirds (a la Flesch)
   c. Eb and E major scales are used as preparation for L'Elephant
4. Book 4 puts strong emphasis on scales

a. Two 8ve C Major scale before #3 Die Meistersinger (thumb position has just been re-introduced in the first two tunes after being introduced in book 3)
b. All major and minor scales (up to two sharps and three flats) are included at the end of the book

5. Book 5 supplies all major and minor scales

II. I have always been compelled to introduce more scales earlier because the bass is just different!

i. More athleticism needed – we cover more ground
ii. We shift earlier
iii. Our ears must develop sooner
iv. Scales are an ideal vehicle to accomplish these goals

III. I have a personal need to introduce more scales, starting with Bk. 2, and throughout Bk. 3

a. By the end of book 3, I like my students to have learned all major scales in two octaves, using open strings when they are available
    i. Usually two scales are assigned per lesson
        1. Memorization is assumed
        2. Retention is not required, but encouraged
        3. Emphasis both on long slow bows and later, speed
        4. Great emphasis placed on hand shape and pitch
    ii. A student may go through the cycle two or more times
        1. Bowings are varied on repetition – slurring two, three, or four notes
        2. Greater scrutiny paid to hand shape through shifts (particularly shifts to half position).
b. By the end of book 4 I like my students to have memorized all major "scales that avoid open strings"
    i. Memorization is required, but only because I use a fingering pattern that is easily retained
        1. First 8ve: 14 12-14 12

2. Two versions of second 8ve for each string
    a. Scales starting on A string: (2)-14-14-123
    b. Scales starting on E string: -4- 12-14-23
3. All 3rd 8ves on G string: (3)-13-13-123
4. Exceptions with E and F Major ("four up" fingerings)

ii. I often require a student to prepare six scales or even all twelve

iii. I have them use the circle of fifths (C, G, D, A, etc.)

c. Starting book 5 or 6, I teach my "universal fingering" for major scales

i. This is a fingering that is the same for every scale

ii. This fingering becomes useful for mastering a variety of techniques

1. Progressive scales of groups of notes – 3, 4, 5, and 6
2. 8-note progressives – modal scales

d. Once the universal fingering is solid for major scales, I introduce a universal fingering for natural minor scales (book 6, usually).

i. Once mastered, I insist on practicing them in the following pattern: C, a , F, d, Bb, g, Eb, etc. (alternation between major and relative minor.

ii. My natural minor scale fingering drills the thumb

e. In "book 7," I teach melodic minor, using my fingering

f. In "book 8," I teach harmonic minor, using my "favorite" fingering

IV. I also introduce chromatic scales, starting in book 4

a. I use a very memorable system to aid retention of fingerings

b. Based on the diminished chords of E, F, and F#

V. I begin to introduce arpeggios in Book 6, and will probably start them earlier in the future.

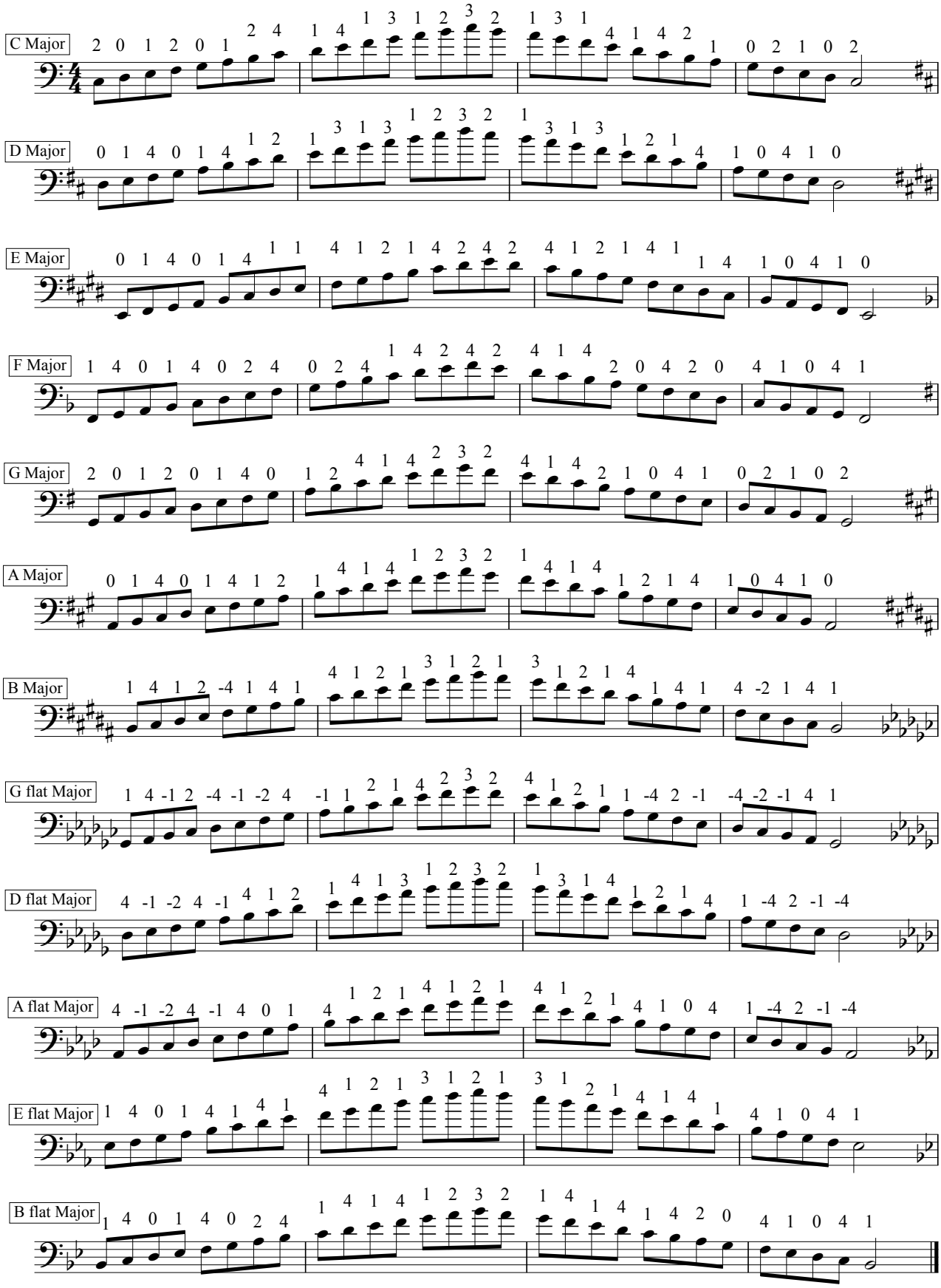
a. I also use a system based on repetitive patterns, or "universal system" when teaching arpeggios.

b. I emphasize playing large numbers of arpeggios (all 12, or 24)

	Scales	**Focus on techniques**
Book 1	Tonalizations	Tone production and hand shape
Book 2	G Major scale (2 8ves)	Focus on hand shape across a variety of positions
Book 3	All major scales in two octaves using open strings	Focus on hand shape (especially after shifts), tone, and pitch. Short-term memorization. Work on slurring 2, 3, and 4
Book 4	All major scales, avoiding open strings	Focus on hand shape, particularly in the short shifts (1/2 step) lower – it is preparation for the pivot. Memorization and retention. Work on slurring in groups of 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8
Book 5	All major scales, using "universal fingering"	Focus on ease of pivot, and retaining a flexible yet strong hand shape – like firm rubber. Work on slurring and spiccato. Opening to work on a variety of "progressive scale" techniques.
"Book 6"	Natural minor scales using a "universal fingering"	Use of thumb in a wide variety of places. Work towards integration of major and minor, so that all 24 scales can be practiced in succession
"Book 7"	Melodic minor	
"Book 8"	Harmonic minor	

Major Scale Fingerings

in two octaves with open strings



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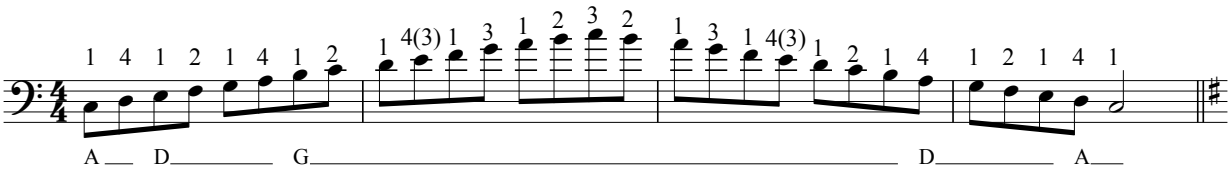
Major Scale Fingerings that Avoid Open Strings
2 and 3 Octave Scales

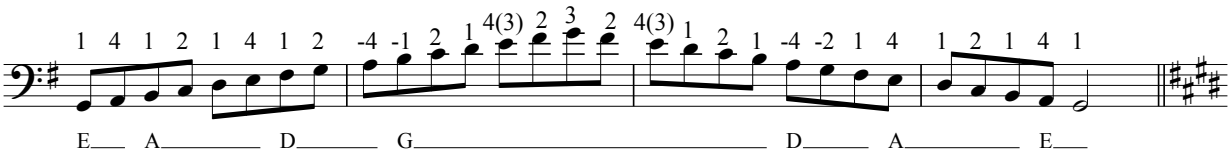
Starting on the A string

This scale fingering works great for B, C, D flat, D, E flat



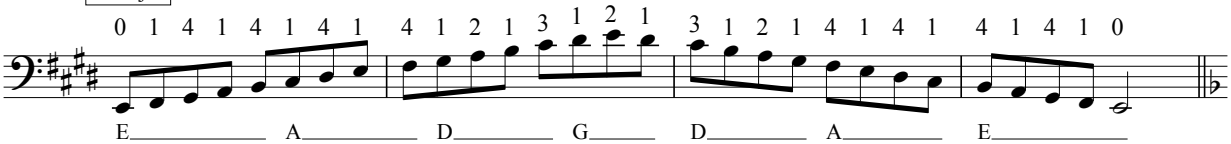
Starting on the E String

This scale fingering works great for G flat, G, A flat, A, B flat

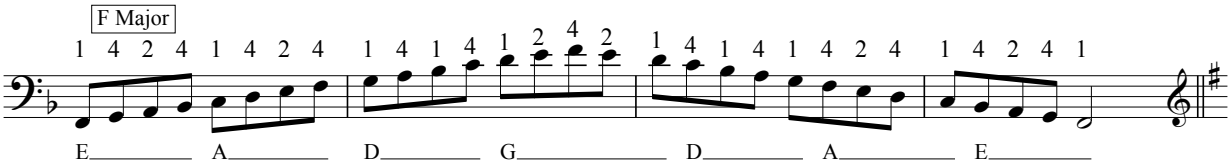


E and F Major

E Major

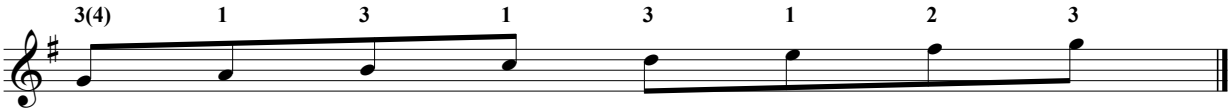


F Major



I call the fingerings for E and F Major "Four Up" fingerings because you use four fingers up each string before moving to the next higher stringuntil you get to the G string. Because the goal of my fingering system is that all fingerings must be memorized and automatic (after some practice) this is a helpful tool for remembering the fingering for these two scales.

Fingering for the 3rd octave for all 12 major scales



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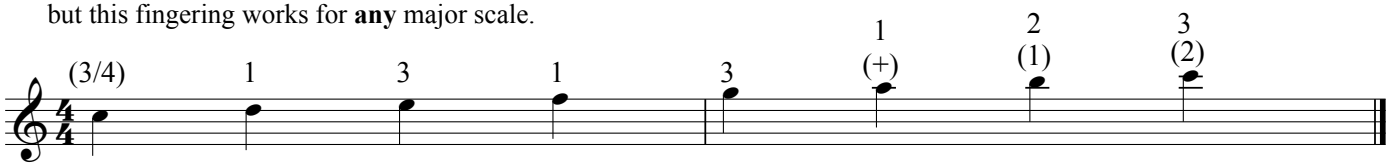
Three Octave Major Scales

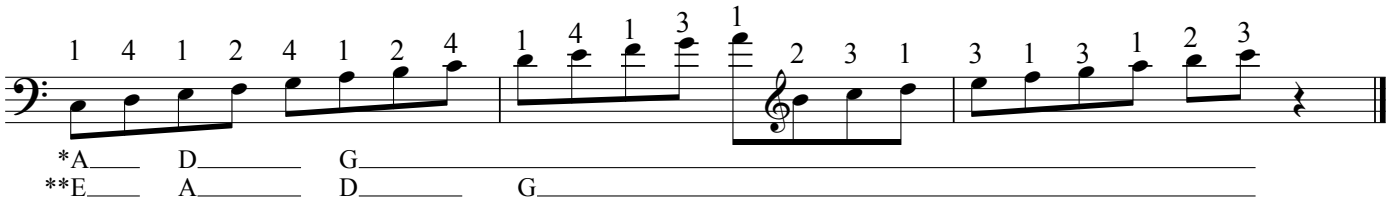
The Third Octave

It is very easy to add a third octave to any two octave major scale fingering. Using the two octave fingerings provided in Suzuki Bass Volume 5, you can add a third octave fingering to any scale by using the following fingering. Starting on the tonic (on whichever finger you ended the second octave), you then play 1 3 - 1 3 - 1 2 3. The fingering for the last three notes may be varied to suit your hand or bass, (+ 2 3 or + 1 2 work just as well). C major is provided below, but this fingering works for **any** major scale.



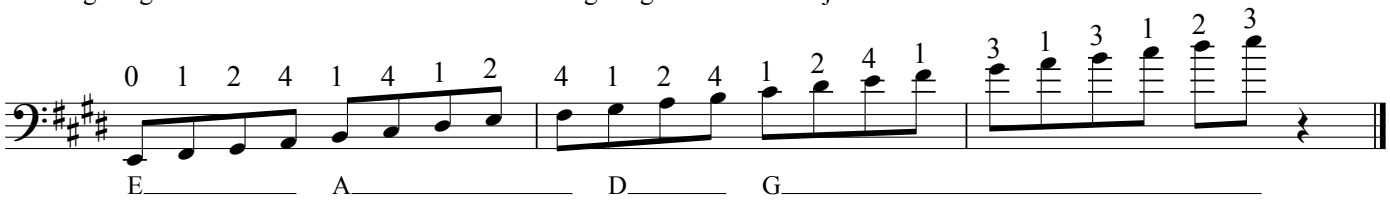
Universal Fingering

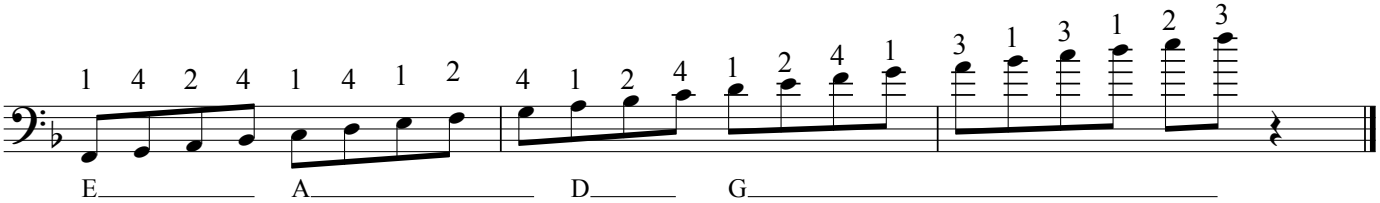
There are innumerable effective and logical fingerings for three octave scales, and many scale books to prove it. However, it often makes sense to have one "universal" fingering you know will work for any major scale. A universal fingering is easily memorized and retained, and also avoids open strings. One such example, provided below, utilizes a pivot fingering, that when practiced with a relaxed hand allows the player to develop speed, agility, and accuracy. Again, the same fingering works for any scale, regardless of whether you start on the A string or E string.



*For scales starting on the A string: B, C, D♭, D, and E♭
**For scales starting on the E string: G♭, G, A♭, A, and B♭

There are two keys that are exceptions to the above universal fingering: E and F major. Below are two suggested fingerings that are derived from the universal fingering for E and F major.





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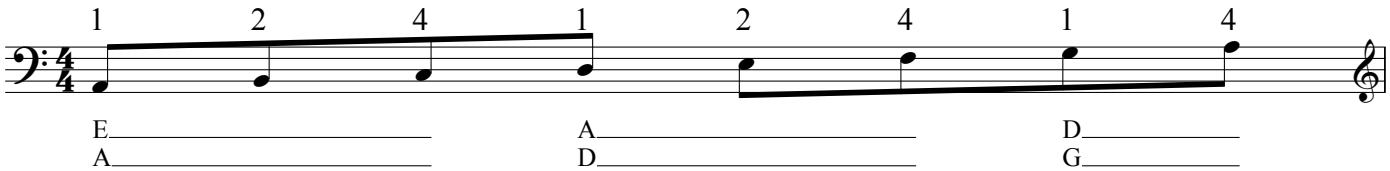
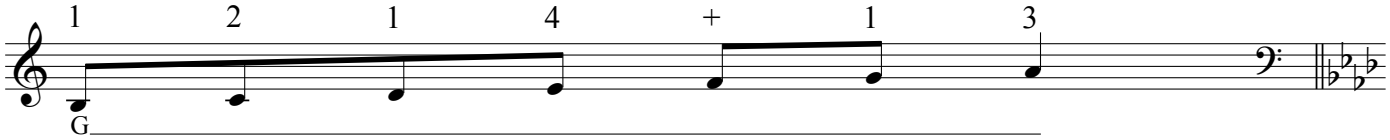
Natural Minor Scales (Universal Fingering)

Paul Sharpe

First octave

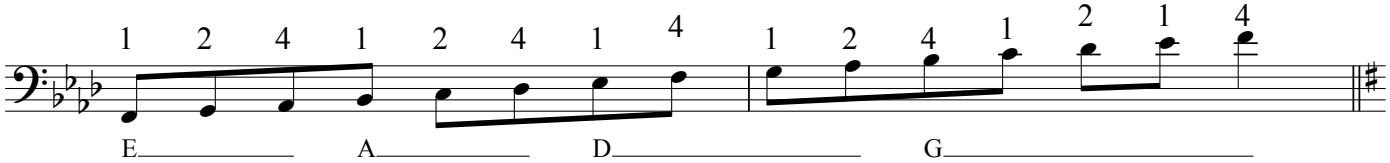


Second and Third octave



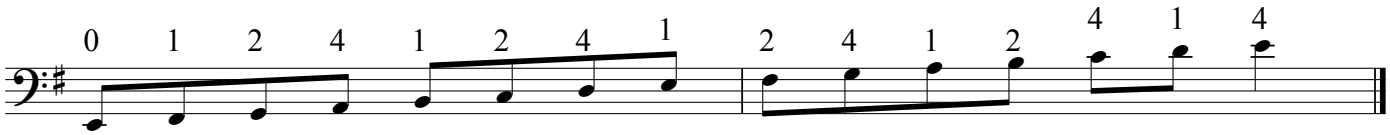
F Natural Minor

The F natural minor scale fingering is the same for the first octave, but by necessity must vary the 2nd 8ve a bit. The third octave fingering is the same for all scales



E Natural Minor

The E natural minor scale fingering is different for the first two octaves. The third octave fingering is the same for all scales.



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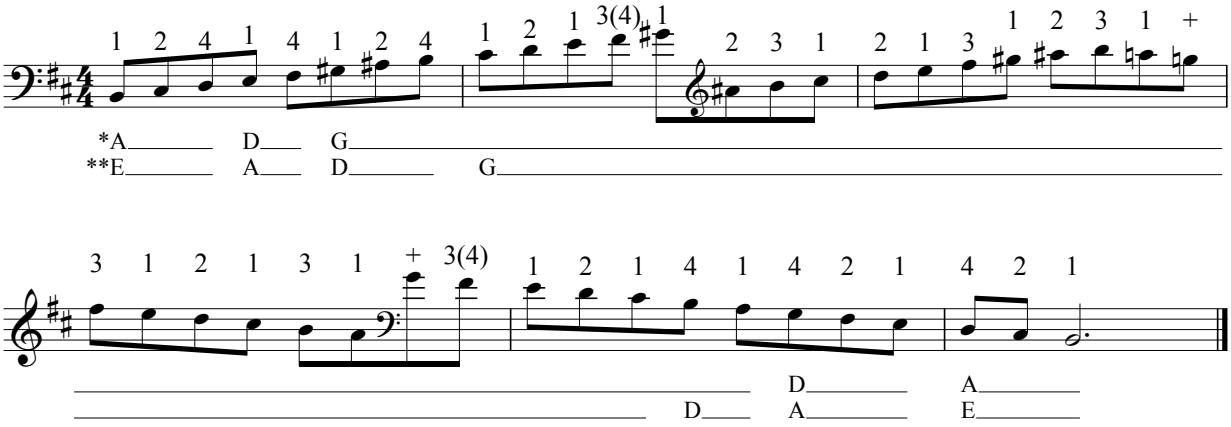
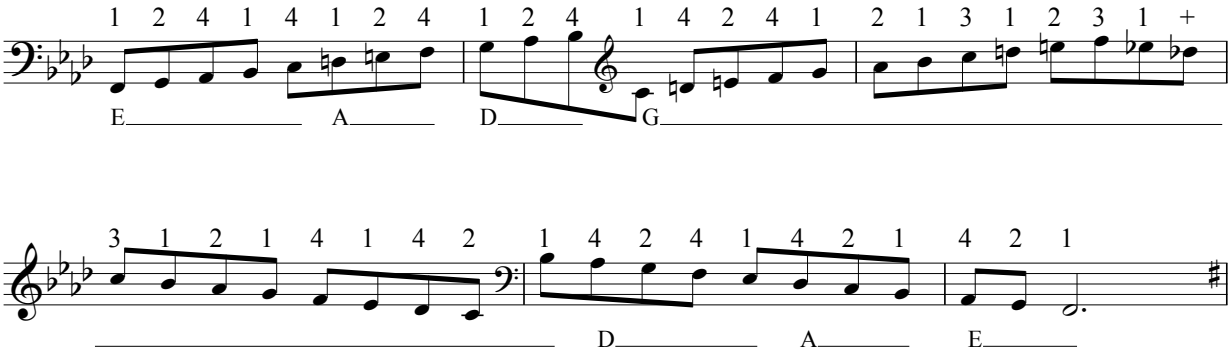
Three Octave Melodic Minor Scales

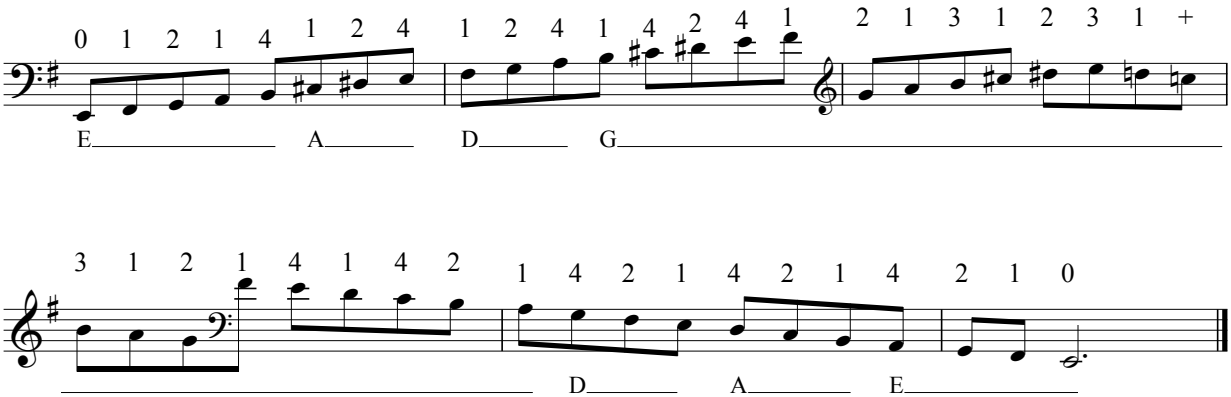
The fingering below uses the same "universal fingering" concept introduced in the major scale fingerings on the previous page. The fingering works for every melodic minor scale (though B minor is used to get you started). The two exceptions are E and F minor, and I have added fingering suggestions for those scales below as well.



F Melodic Minor



E Melodic Minor



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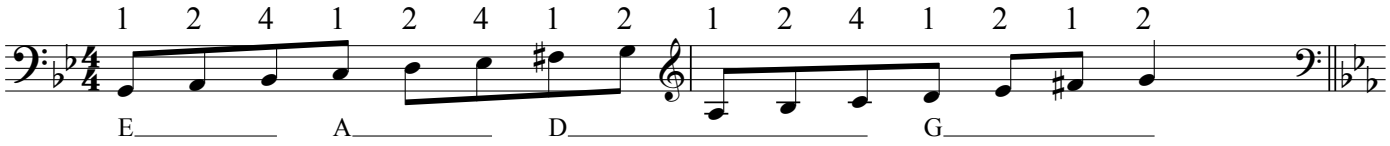
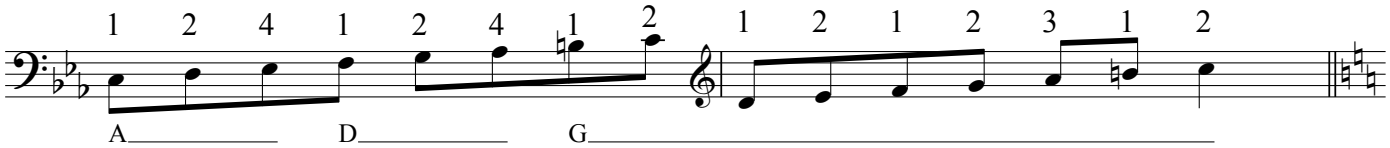
Harmonic Minor Scales (My favorite fingerings)

Paul Sharpe

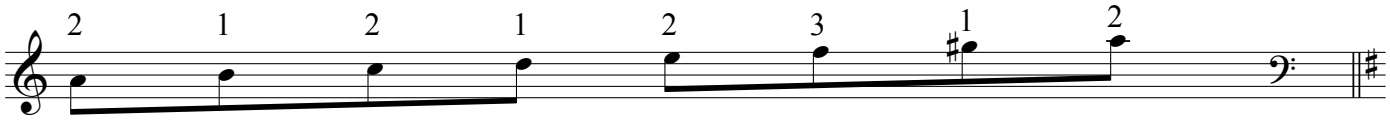
Fingering for scales starting on the E string



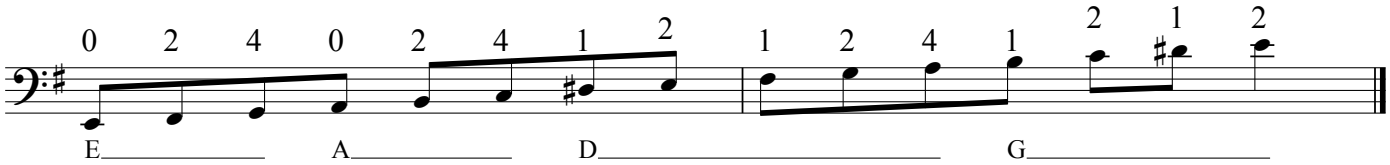
Fingering for scales starting on the A string



3rd octave fingering - for any scale



E Harmonic Minor



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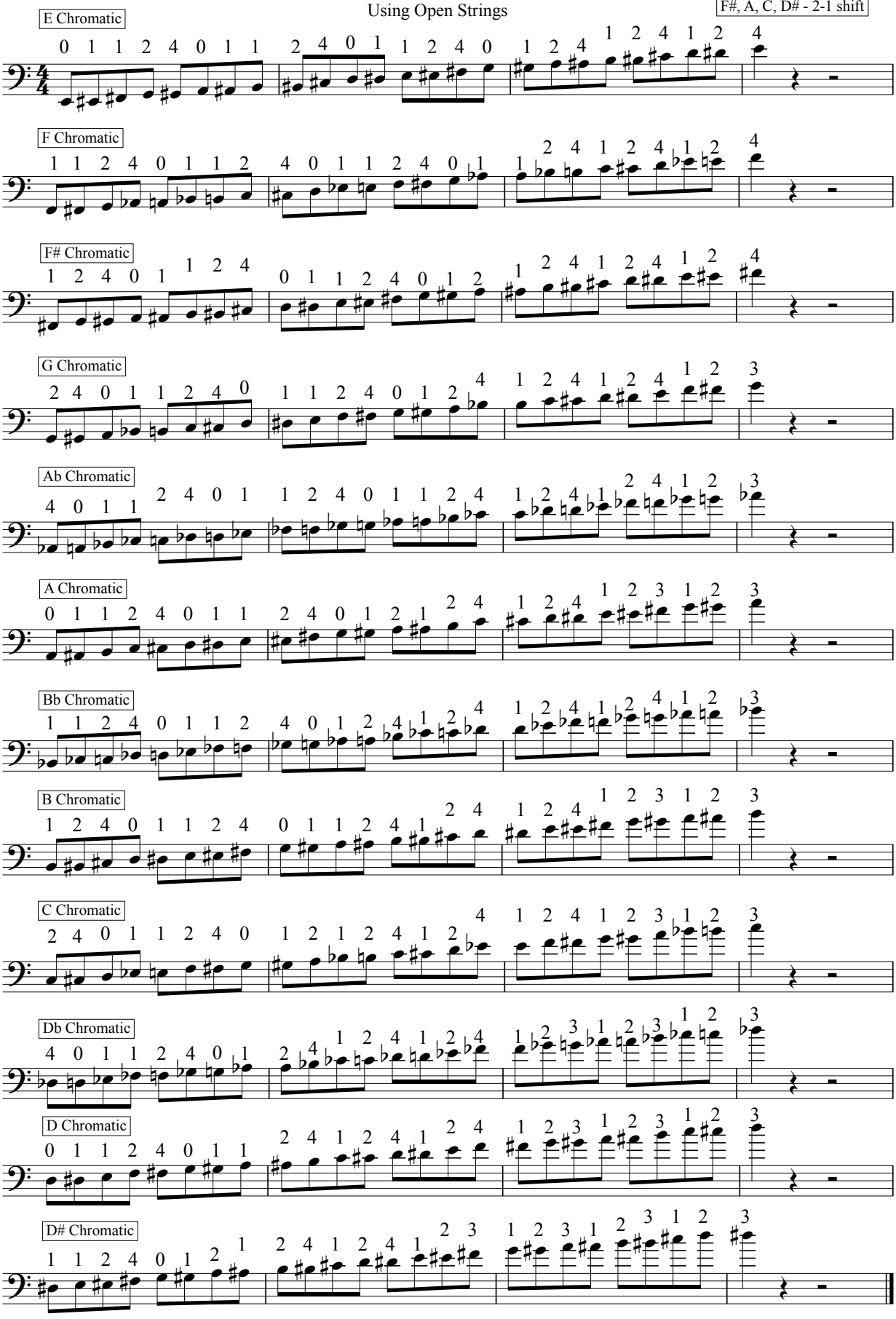
Chromatic Scales in Two Octaves

Using Open Strings

E, G, Bb, Db - no shift
F, Ab, B, D - 1-1 shift
F#, A, C, D# - 2-1 shift



Major Arpeggios in Three Octaves

Universal Fingerings

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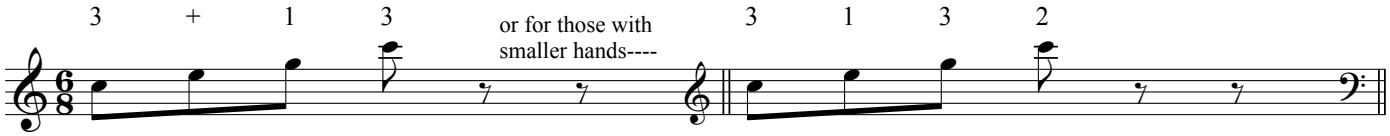
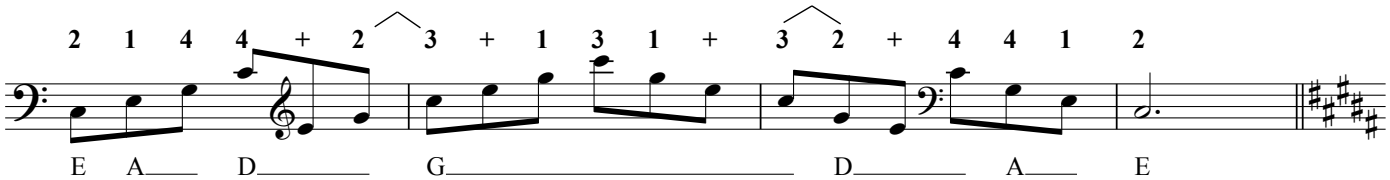
This fingering always ends with the following fingering pattern (starting on the root of the third octave).



Q. If the above fingering works for nearly every major scale, the question is... how do we get there?
A. You have two options; please see below.

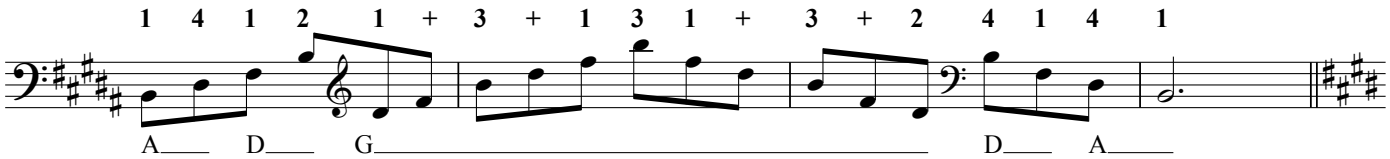
1

You can start on the E string.
In my hand this works for 8 of 12 keys (Gb, **G, Ab, A, Bb, B, C, Db**), and very well for 7 of them (in bold).

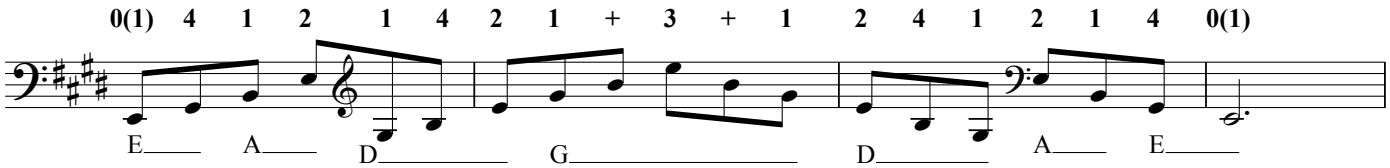
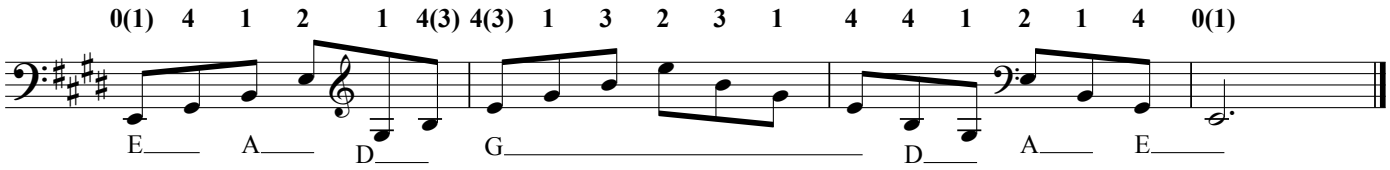


2

Or you can start on the A string.
In my hand this works very well for six keys (Bb, B, C, Db, D, Eb).



Finally, for E and F Major you need a new fingering.
Though it is based on fingering #2 above. This works well for E, F, Gb, G, Ab, A, Bb, B



Or, this one, which includes elements of #2, and concludes with the "small hand" fingering listed at the top of the page.
This works well for E, F, Gb