

Memorisation of the cycle of fifths using the 4 string bass guitar as an aid-memoir

The minor cycle of fifths is quite literally the key to understanding music and how everything slots together in the world of melody and harmony.

Consequently a method to understand and then instantly recall this information would be useful from both a practical and theoretical perspective.

The cycle of fifths is adequately explained in most musical text books but what is left out is how to retain and subsequently recall this information for future use (especially when the text book is not available to scrutinize).

In a practical situation a bass player will always have the instrument readily to hand so it would seem logical to tie any type of memorisation system to the fingerboard itself

Figure No 1 shows the notes of the A natural minor scale (zero sharps) for both the E and A strings; plus all the other A natural notes on the D and G strings.

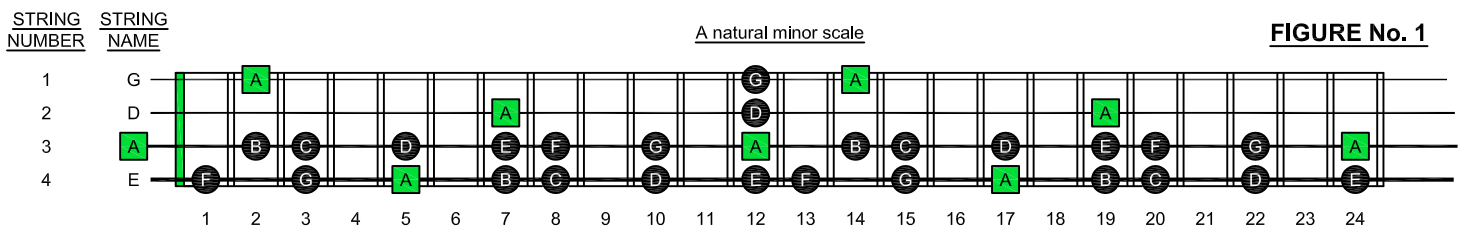


FIGURE No. 1

The simplest way to play a natural minor scale is along the length of the same string using the index finger to fret each note and this is shown in Figure No.2 for A natural minor (zero sharps) and Figure No.3 for E natural minor (one sharp).

Figure No.2

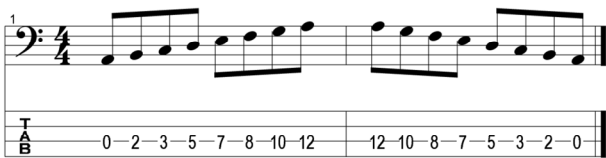
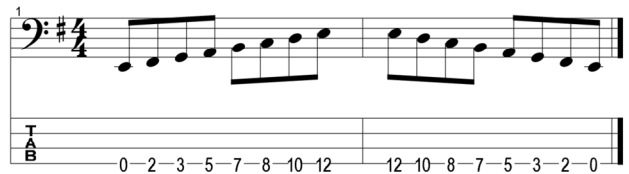
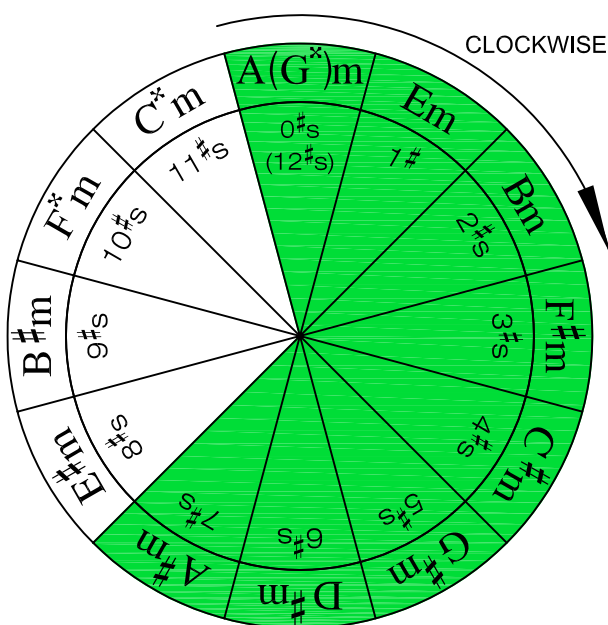


Figure No.3



Although these are the easiest ways to play the A and E natural minor scale they are not practical for the memorisation method as the fretboard soon gets used up whilst traveling around the minor cycle of fifths (see Figure No.4).

FIGURE No. 4



MINOR CYCLE OF FIFTHS

Thus the 3Am1 and 4Em2 octave shapes are pressed into action being played alternately at two-fret intervals as follows:-

- Figure No.5 - A minor scale (5Am1 octave shape)
- Figure No.6 - E minor scale (4Em2 octave shape)
- Figure No.7 - B minor scale (5Am1 octave shape)
- Figure No.8 - F# minor scale (4Em2 octave shape)
- Figure No.9 - C# minor scale (5Am1 octave shape)
- Figure No.10 - G# minor scale (4Em2 octave shape)
- Figure No.11 - D# minor scale (5Am1 octave shape)
- Figure No.12 - A# minor scale (4Em2 octave shape)

Additionally tables have been provided for all eight keys each one details the seven scale chords for that particular minor key.

Am

Key of A minor - Zero sharps

FIGURE No. 5

Im	IIdim	\flat III	IVm	Vm	\flat VI	\flat VII
Am	Bdim	C	Dm	Em	F	G

Am

FINGERING

NOTE NAMES

INTERVALS

Em

Key of E minor - 1 sharp

FIGURE No.6

Im	IIdim	\flat III	IVm	Vm	\flat VI	\flat VII
Em	F \sharp dim	G	Am	Bm	C	D

Em

FINGERING

NOTE NAMES

INTERVALS

Bm

Key of B minor - 2 sharps

FIGURE No. 7

Im	IIdim	\flat III	IVm	Vm	\flat VI	\flat VII
Bm	C \sharp dim	D	Em	F \sharp m	G	A

Bm

FINGERING

NOTE NAMES

INTERVALS

F \sharp m

Key of F sharp minor - 3 sharps

FIGURE No. 8

Im	IIdim	\flat III	IVm	Vm	\flat VI	\flat VII
F \sharp m	G \sharp dim	A	Bm	C \sharp m	D	E

F \sharp m

FINGERING

NOTE NAMES

INTERVALS

C \sharp m

Key of C sharp minor - 4 sharps

FIGURE No. 9

Im	IIdim	\flat III	IVm	Vm	\flat VI	\flat VII
C \sharp m	D \sharp dim	E	F \sharp m	G \sharp m	A	B

C \sharp m

FINGERING

NOTE NAMES

INTERVALS

G \sharp m

Key of G sharp minor - 5 sharps

FIGURE No. 10

Im	IIdim	\flat III	IVm	Vm	\flat VI	\flat VII
G \sharp m	A \sharp dim	B	C \sharp m	D \sharp m	E	F \sharp

G \sharp m

FINGERING

NOTE NAMES

INTERVALS

D \sharp m

Key of D sharp minor - 6 sharps

FIGURE No. 11

Im	IIdim	\flat III	IVm	Vm	\flat VI	\flat VII
D \sharp m	E \sharp dim	F \sharp	G \sharp m	A \sharp m	B	C \sharp

D \sharp m

FINGERING

NOTE NAMES

INTERVALS

A \sharp m

Key of A sharp minor - 7 sharps

FIGURE No. 12

Im	IIdim	\flat III	IVm	Vm	\flat VI	\flat VII
A \sharp m	B \sharp dim	C \sharp	D \sharp m	E \sharp m	F \sharp	G \sharp

A \sharp m

FINGERING

NOTE NAMES

INTERVALS

Thus the essence of the memorisation system for the minor cycle of fifths is to play root notes for the tonic chord (Im) of the key starting at the nut and alternating between the A and E strings every two frets. This process is stopped when a total of seven sharp notes have been accumulated and the last practical sharp key has been reached, this is represented by the green shaded segments on Figure No.4. However the process can be continued until fret twelve is reached on the A string (representing the key of G double sharp) where a full 360 degrees has been traveled and everything starts all over again.