

Martin Widmaier

Die wichtigsten Tonleitern Basic Scales

für Klavier / for piano

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Preliminary Note

Scales are no excuse for spending an hour or two at the keyboard without engaging the brain and the perception system. They aren't patterns which are learned beforehand and miraculously turn into music later. Scales are music. They are a good opportunity to get in contact with the landscape of the instrument, and a good chance to find out more about metre and rhythm, harmony and melody. By practising scales in an attentive manner, we become better and better musicians.

The fingerings given here are tried, tested and ready for use – they stand in the tradition of experts such as Johann Nepomuk Hummel (1778–1837), Carl Eschmann-Dumur (1835–1913) and Moritz Moszkowski (1854–1925). Admittedly, the counter-concept in the tradition of Carl Czerny (1791–1857) and Charles Louis Hanon (1819–1900) has found wider acceptance. However, Czerny's idea of projecting the standard fingering of the one-octave scale onto the full major scale wherever possible has proven troublesome with regard to the left hand. For a first impression, compare Hummel's A-major fingering as given on page 5 with the popular Czerny version. The longer the scale, the bigger the advantage of the Hummel approach.

For more information and technical advice, please consult my online essay *Scales for Brain Users*. This present compendium doesn't explain the principles behind the so-called 'corresponding' fingerings, nor does it tell you how to perform and practise, say, the thumb-under and hand-over movements. It attempts something else: to provide exercises worth spending time on.

Basic Scales is dedicated to Jeerarat Eiamcharoen.

Martin Widmaier

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Basic Scales

for piano

► One-octave scales in C major

One-octave scales are very common in piano music. They usually start on a white key; the standard fingering is three plus five fingers. In the following exercise, the one-octave scales start on every degree of the C-major scale. The accompaniment features the eight intervals from prime to octave.

The first system of the exercise consists of four measures. The right hand (treble clef) plays a scale starting on C4, with fingering 1-2-3-4-5-4-3-2-1. The left hand (bass clef) plays a sequence of intervals: a whole note (C4), a half note (D4), a quarter note (E4), a quarter note (F4), a half note (G4), a quarter note (A4), a quarter note (B4), and a whole note (C5). The measure numbers 1, 2, 3, and 4 are written below the bass staff.

The second system consists of four measures. The right hand plays a scale starting on D4, with fingering 1-2-3-4-5-4-3-2-1. The left hand plays intervals: a whole note (D4), a half note (E4), a quarter note (F4), a quarter note (G4), a half note (A4), a quarter note (B4), a quarter note (C5), and a whole note (D5). The measure numbers 5, 6, 7, and 8 are written below the bass staff.

The third system consists of four measures. The right hand plays a scale starting on E4, with fingering 1-2-3-4-5-4-3-2-1. The left hand plays intervals: a whole note (E4), a half note (F4), a quarter note (G4), a quarter note (A4), a half note (B4), a quarter note (C5), a quarter note (D5), and a whole note (E5). The measure numbers 17, 18, 19, and 20 are written below the bass staff.

The fourth system consists of four measures. The right hand plays a scale starting on F4, with fingering 1-2-3-4-5-4-3-2-1. The left hand plays intervals: a whole note (F4), a half note (G4), a quarter note (A4), a quarter note (B4), a half note (C5), a quarter note (D5), a quarter note (E5), and a whole note (F5). The measure numbers 21, 22, 23, and 24 are written below the bass staff.

► Also accompany with a syncopated rhythm:

A single line of musical notation in the bass clef, 4/4 time signature. The rhythm consists of a sequence of notes: a quarter note (C4), a quarter note (D4), a quarter note (E4), a quarter note (F4), a quarter note (G4), a quarter note (A4), a quarter note (B4), a quarter note (C5), a quarter note (B4), a quarter note (A4), a quarter note (G4), a quarter note (F4), a quarter note (E4), a quarter note (D4), a quarter note (C4), and a whole note (C4). The measure number 25 is written below the staff.

► **One-octave scales in other keys**

One-octave scales can show up in any major or minor key. In a piano piece, always adapt fingering to the black and white keys. For exercise, in contrast, it is a good idea to always use standard fingering regardless of convenience. Here are the first four positions in F major:

- For a start, practise F major and G major.
- Also accompany with a syncopated rhythm.

► **Full major scales – 3/4 metre – Db major and B major**

In flat keys, the LH is the 'leading' hand, in sharp keys, the RH. The simple reason is that in these hands, the three-finger group always falls onto the first three degrees of the scale.

- In a flat key, practise the LH first, in a sharp key, the RH.
- With hands together, also play one hand legato, the other staccato.
- Or employ special articulations:

- Also employ the following rhythms:

► Full major scales – 3/4 metre – F major and G major

► Full major scales – 3/4 metre – Eb major and A major

► Full major scales – 3/4 metre – Ab major and E major

Due to the more or less favourable situation on the black and white keys, the four scales above are easy to play, while the four scales below have their pitfalls ...

► Full major scales – 3/4 metre – Bb major and D major

► Full major scales – 3/4 metre – C major and F#/Gb major

► Full major scales – 3/4 metre – contrary movement

This extensive exercise starts in E \flat major, rises chromatically and ends in D major. With every new section, the old tonic note becomes the new leading note.

► Piano inspection scale

This smart scale covers the whole range of the keyboard. Use standard fingering (see next exercise), but take four fingers at the very bottom and four fingers at the very top.

► Chromatic scale with 1-2-3 and 1-3

There are many ways to play the chromatic scale.

Here is the standard fingering; below, you will find two more options.

► Also choose a 4/4 metre and fill in quaver triplets.

► Also employ the following rhythms:

► Chromatic scale with 1-2-3 and 1-2-3-4

► Chromatic scale with 3-4-5 and 3-5

► **Full major scales – 4/4 metre**

The full major scales in 4/4 metre exceed those in 3/4 metre by one octave.
Practise in every key. Here is D \flat major:

- In a flat key, practise the LH first, in a sharp key, the RH.
- With hands together, also play one hand legato, the other staccato.
- Or employ special articulations.
- Also employ the following rhythms:

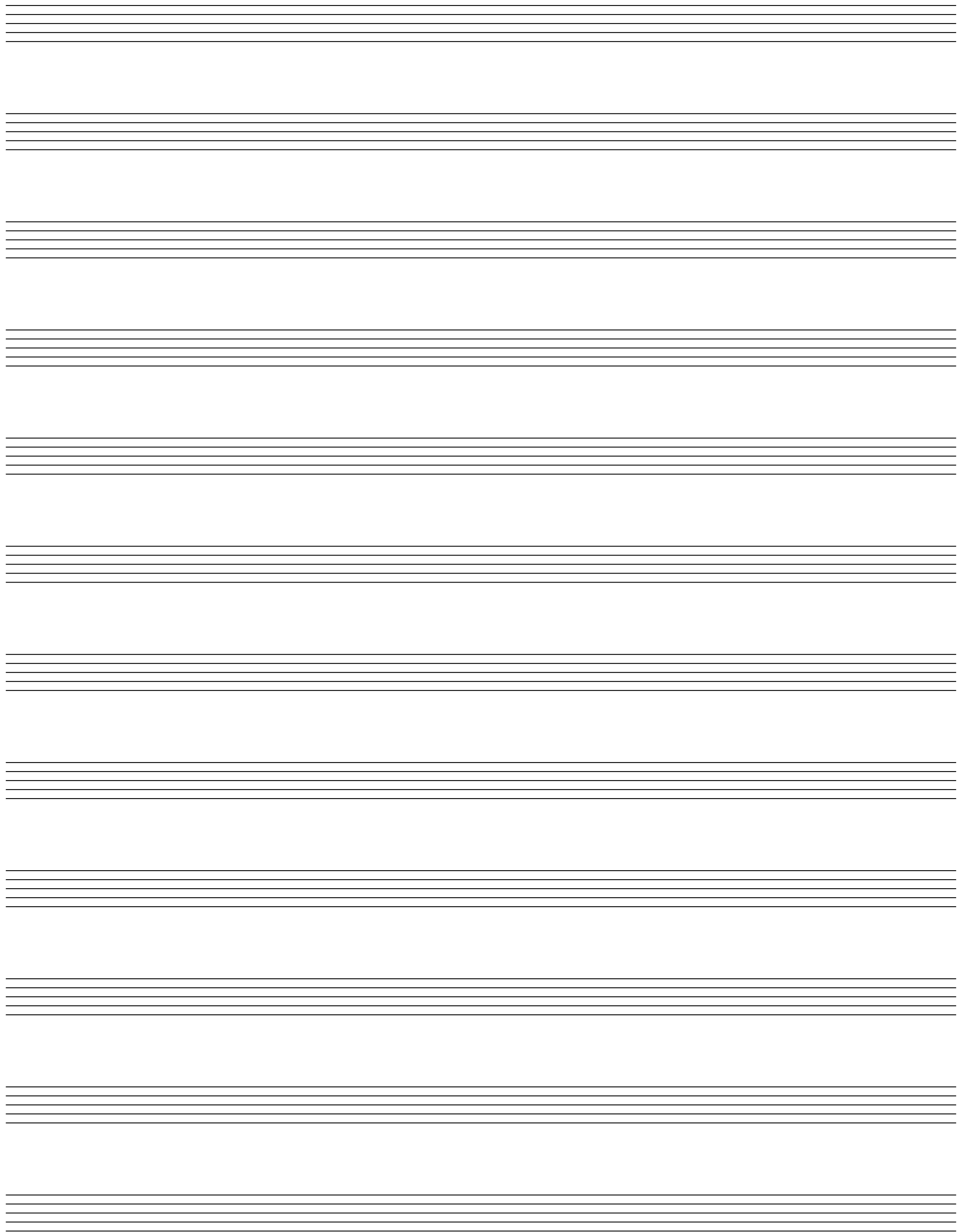
► **Full major scales – 4/4 metre – tenths and sixths**

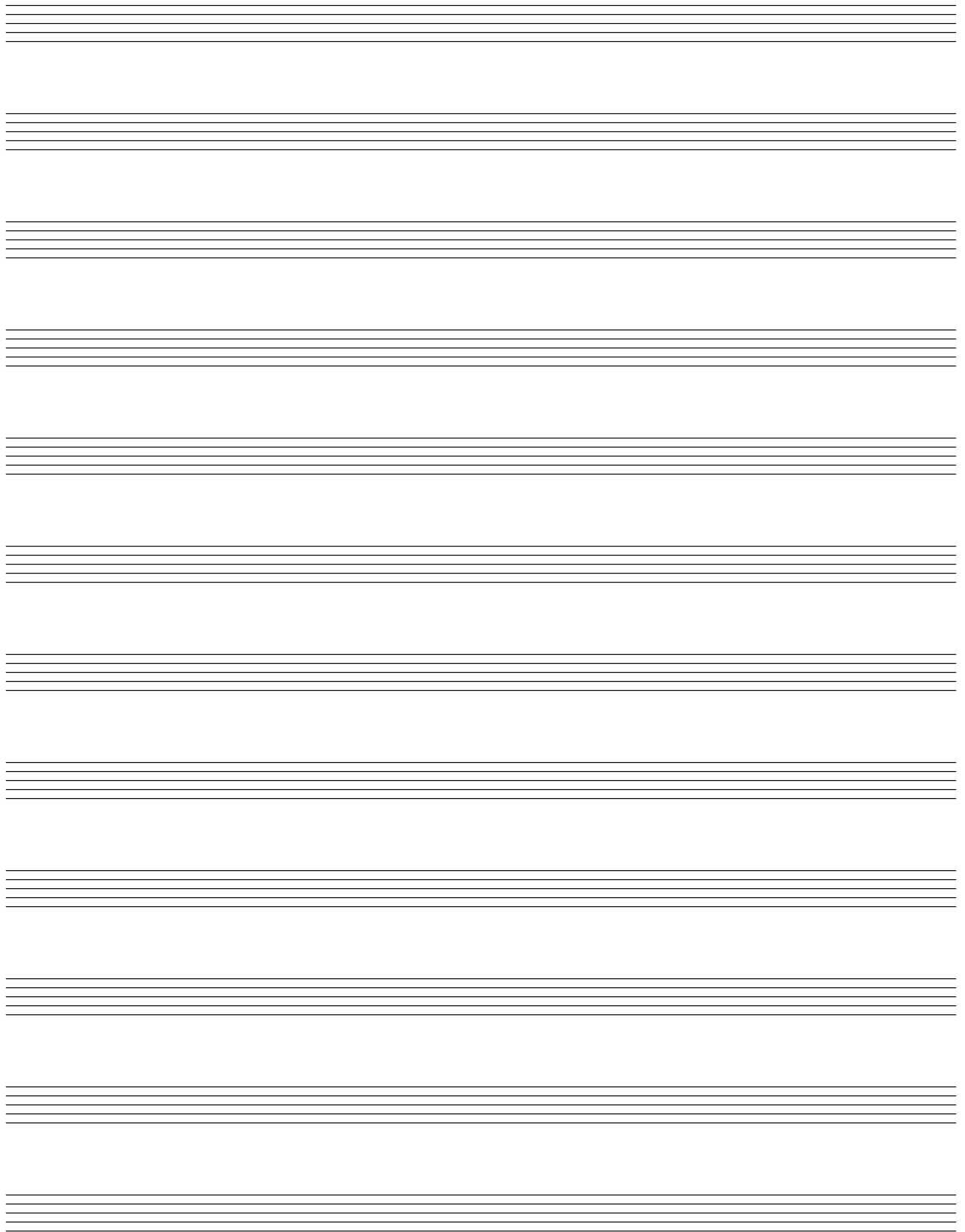
Again, this extensive exercise starts in E \flat major, rises chromatically and ends in D major.

► **Diminished-seventh chord arpeggios**

Having studied major in detail, it is not necessary to practise minor in a similar fashion. For melodic minor, try my *Plain Studies* Nos. 1 and 3. For harmonic minor, practise diminished-seventh chord arpeggios in order to gain experience with augmented seconds. Start from the seven white keys.

- Also play the crotchets legato, the quaver triplets staccato – and vice versa.
- Or employ special articulations.





Offline Publications

Orange Blue: *In Love with a Dream. Songbook*,

with piano arrangements by Burkhard Scheibe and Martin Widmaier, Peer, Hamburg 2001

Martin Widmaier: *Das kleine Land* (2 volumes), Peters, Frankfurt 2005/2006

Martin Widmaier: *24 Eight-Bar Studies after Frédéric Chopin*, Peters, Frankfurt 2012

Claude Debussy: *Préludes for Piano* (2 volumes), edited by Thomas Kabisch,

with fingerings by Martin Widmaier, Bärenreiter, Kassel 2014/20??

Martin Widmaier: *Basic Scales for Piano*, Naresuan University Publishing House, Phitsanulok 2015

Martin Widmaier: *Zur Systemdynamik des Übens*, Schott, Mainz 2016

August Halm: *Klavierübung* 1918/1919, edited by Thomas Kabisch, Linde Großmann

and Martin Widmaier, Ortus, Berlin 2019

For **Online Publications**, see www.martinwidmaier.de