

Fun with Chromatic Octaves

When I was teaching at the National Guitar Workshop a few weeks ago, I was expected to present a technique lecture every day. I was asked what my next day's lesson would be, and I responded..."Um...fun with chromatic octaves?", which seems to be an oxymoron. I came home and jotted down these exercises I've been using for a while.

I've found that using a chromatic octave scale is a much more satisfying way of practicing Right Hand (r.h.) technique than just using open strings. It has the benefit of allowing your r.h. to practice strokes on different strings while the Left Hand (l.h.) is utilizing a pattern which helps stimulate finger independence, stretching and agility.

The chromatic octave scale I use is in 1st position. Learn it ascending and descending. Use free strokes in the fingers and thumb for now. Keep the R.H. fingering as simple as possible when learning the scale.

Ex. 1

After having a reasonable facility with this scale, I then use it to practice alternating thumb and finger (free stroke patterns) In order to gain velocity, I use speed bursts. Practice example 2 with all the R.H. finger combinations listed. Remember to keep your hand relaxed, especially when practicing the p-m combination. Let the motions come from the fingers (from the knuckle down) and not from the hand or the arm.

Ex. 2

When you have a grasp on this, put your metronome (or preferably, a drum machine) on a slower tempo and subdivide the bursts further into 32nd notes.

Ex. 3

Next, use the scale to practice tremolo. Again, I start with eight notes and then subdivide to 16th notes for the bursts. It is VERY important to practice tremolo with different starting finger combinations in order to gain control. When practicing tremolo, try to limit the planting that your r.h. does.

Ex.4

Again...put your drum machine at a slower tempo and further subdivide into 32nd notes.

Ex. 5

With regards to your left hand, it is important that you limit the amount of motion in your hand and arm. Allow the fingers extend and contract in order to achieve the octave without involving the arm. Have your l.h. fingers prepare in the air for the next shape.

Have fun with this l.h pattern and use it to break up the monotony of any r.h. technique practice you do. Until next month...don't press too hard.

ST

©Steven Thachuk, 2006