

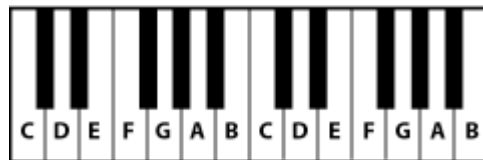
You don't need to know any of this to play bluegrass or old-time music, but it may help out in understanding how the music works.

Most songs or tunes use a scale of just seven notes. But, which seven notes?

We must pick the notes of our scale. We pick the main 'tonic' note we want from the twelve notes: A A# B C C# D D# E F F# G G# but how do we select the other six notes the tune will use? There are seven 'modes' that can be used to pick the seven notes: Ionian (major), Dorian, Phrygian, Lydian, Mixolydian, Aeolian (minor) and Locrian. OK, that's a choice of 7 modes x 12 starting notes = 84 different scales. Fortunately, instead of 84 scales, in Bluegrass there are really only a handful of scales commonly used. Nearly all our music uses a 'major' scale starting on the tonic note of either G, D, A, or C. Sometimes we play using a 'minor' scale (usually A minor) and rarely we use a 'modal' scale. So instead of 84 scales, there are just five scales used commonly and they differ by just a couple of notes.

Major Key: How do we know which seven notes to use?

For any major key, we play 7 notes that start with the 'tonic' note. Say we want to play in C major. On a piano, the notes of C major are the white keys: C-D-E-F-G-A-B-C. To play in any other major key we can just start with the tonic note for that key and then play the notes that are *at the same intervals* as the notes in the C major scale.



What do we mean by intervals? The C major notes are separated by either a whole or half interval. That is, either they have a black key (sharp) in between, or they don't. From C to D is a 'whole' interval because there is a key between C and D. But between E and F there is no extra key, so the interval from E to F is called a 'half' interval. On the keyboard count the intervals between the notes of C major. They are: *w-w-h-w-w-w-h-* OK, that set of intervals *w-w-h-w-w-w-h-* is the intervals of a major key. Play in any major key you want – that is, start with any tonic note you want - as long as you keep the intervals between the notes the same as these intervals, you will be playing in a major key.

Let's say you want to play in the key of D major. The scale starts on D and you pick the seven notes by counting up from D according to the *w-w-h-w-w-w-h-* intervals. That gives: D E F# G A B C# D. The interval rule says that the space between the 1st and 2nd notes has to be a whole interval. OK, there is a black key between D and E so that is a whole interval. The step from 2nd to 3rd notes of the scale has to be a whole step, but E to F is just a half step, nothing between. So you have to go up another half step from F to F#. From the 3rd note F# to the 4th note must be just a half step, according to the interval rule, so you have to go from F# to the next note with no intervening step. That is G. And so on...

To play in the Key of C play C-D-E-F-G-A-B-C separated by the intervals *w w h w w w h*
To play in the Key of G you must count the same intervals and get G-A-B-C-D-E-F#-G
To play in the Key of D you must count the same intervals and get D-E-F#-G-A-B-C#-D
To play in the Key of A you must count the same intervals and get A B C# D E F# G# A

Start on any note. As long as you keep the intervals to choose the notes, it will be a major key.

Obviously you are not going to be doing this on the fly as you are playing a tune! You figure it out ahead of time and practice playing some scales, then if you play in a jam, your fingers will know where to go, you will recognize the key of the song and play the notes that belong in that key.

Minor and Modal

When we listen to a minor or modal tune, we recognize right away that *something* is different. But what? These tunes use a set of notes which is selected according to a different set of intervals.

Minor keys notes are selected according to the intervals *w-h-w-w-h-w-w* This is the same as the intervals which occur on the keyboard if you start on A and play the white keys up to the next A A-B-C-D-E-F-G-A It is a bizarre quirk of the human mind that when we hear these notes used to play a tune circling around and ending on the A, it gives us a sad, lonely, mournful or melancholy feeling. But if we hear the exact same notes used in a tune circling around the C, we don't get that feeling.

'Modal' is the term that most of us use to refer to tunes which are in the Mixolydian or Dorian modes. These are slightly different from 'minor'. Mixolydian is the same intervals as if you started on the G note and played white keys up to G. – that is, the intervals *w-w-h-w-w-h-w*, and Dorian is the same as if you started on the D up to the next D using the white keys, that is *w-h-w-w-w-h-w*.

So, here are the notes in various modes for A and G keys. I've noted the number of tunes transcribed in that key in Milliner-Koken *Collection of American Fiddle Tunes* so you can see how common they are:

Key of G major	G A B C D E F# G	(400 tunes)	
Key of G mixolydian	G A B C D E F G	(9)	
Key of G dorian	G A A# C D E F G	(0)	
Key of G minor	G A A# C D D# F G	(4)	(A# = Bb, D# = Eb)
Key of A major	A B C# D E F# G# A	(250 tunes)	
Key of A mix.	A B C# D E F# G A	(mix., dorian and minor combined, over 200)	
Key of A dorian	A B C D E F# G A		
Key of A minor	A B C D E F G A		

Why so many tunes in these unusual A scales? That would be a good question for some violin student to answer. I think it has to do with how easy it is to reach the notes when you are playing in these keys. I should add that many of these tunes are played with quite a lot of inconsistency and the old fiddlers were not always strict about playing the notes with perfect intonation as all our violinist and contest fiddlers of today. For that reason, when we listen to old recordings it is not always possible to say exactly which mode the tune was being played in!

You may notice that G mix Amin and Cmaj all use the same exact notes in their scale. Many scales use the same notes. This does NOT mean that they sound the same. It makes a big difference which note acts as the center or 'tonic' for the tune. But it does mean that if you are alert, you might recognize what is happening in an odd tune and be able to play along right away

Chords for a tune:

Because the notes of the major, minor and modal scales are different, the chords used to accompany the tunes have to be different.

Key of A major	A B C# D E F# G# A	common chords A, D, E or E7
Key of A mix.	A B C# D E F# G A	common chords A, G, Em
Key of A dorian	A B C D E F# G A	common chords Am, G
Key of A minor	A B C D E F G A	common chords Am, G, sometimes C, Em, Dm

When you are playing in A major, the 1-4-5 chords are A (A, C#, E), D (D, F#, A) and E (E, G#, B). Those chords fit because all the notes in those three chords are also notes in the A major scale.

But in the A minor scale there is no C#, F# or G# so those chords generally won't work. Instead, what will generally work will be the chords Am and G, and less often, C (the chord of the relative** major key) or Em (the relative minor chord of G). This is because the notes in an A minor chord are (A, C, E) and a G chord is (G, B, D), the E minor chord has (E, B, G) and a C chord has (C, E, G), the D minor chord is (D, F, A) all of which notes occur in the A minor scale.

**"Relative minor" is what we call the minor key that has the same scale notes as the major key. So A minor is the relative minor to C major because A minor and C major use the same seven notes. The relative minor to G major is E minor because E minor uses the same notes as G. The relative minor to D major is B minor. The relative minor to A is F# minor.

Campgrounds full of old-time and bluegrass musicians play wonderful music without ever having gone through or even heard of the details of these permutations. But on the other hand, if you are trying to figure out the chords for a tune and you understand all of this, life is easier

Some well-known traditional fiddle tunes in A minor or A modal keys...

Boatin Up Sandy	Growlin Old Man and Woman	Pretty Little Shoes
Bus Stop Reel	Grub Springs	Pretty Polly
Cattle in the Cane	Half Past Four	Sally in the Garden
Cluck Old Hen	Hell Among the Yearlings	Sandy Boys
Cotton Eyed Joe	Jenny have some Cider	Santa Anna's Retreat
Cuckoo's Nest	Jenny Ran Away in the Mud in	Shady Grove
Ducks on the Pond	the Night	Tater patch
Dusty Miller	June Apple	Texas
Elzic's Farewell	Kitchen Gal	Trouble on Mind
Falls of Richmond	Lady of the Lake	Valley Forge
Fine Times at Our House	Little Beggarman (Redhaired	Yew Piney Mountain
Fire on the Mountain	Boy)	Ways of the World
Frosty Morning	Little Sadie	Wild Hog in the Woods
Greasy Coat	Lonesome John	Wild Rose of the Mountain
	Pretty Little Dog	

June Apple Notes

matt McConeghy 2/2012

June Apple is a classic ‘modal’ Appalachian fiddle tune. It is often associated with Tommy Jarrell (1901- 1985), an iconic fiddler from the Mt Airy and Round Peak neighborhood of North Carolina.

<p>Tommy Jarrell’s verses:</p> <p><i>Wish I was a June Apple Hanging on a tree Every time my true love passed She'd take a little bite of me *** Going across the mountain I'm Going in a swing When I get on the other side I'm gonna hear my woman sing *** Don't you hear that banjo saying I wish that gal was mine Can't you hear that banjo saying I wish that gal was mine *** Charlie he's a nice young man Charlie he's a dandy Charlie he's a nice young He feeds the gals on candy *** Over the river to feed my sheep Over the river Charlie Over the river to feed my sheep Feed them on barley *** Wish I had some sticks and poles Build my chimney higher Ever time it rains or snows Puts out all my fire</i></p>	<p>Tommy was a colorful and amiable character from a musical family. After his retirement from the NC Highway dept in 1966 he opened his modest home in the hamlet of Toast, NC to scores of young musicians who were just then becoming interested in traditional fiddling. These young apostles, often budding folklorists from nearby UNC, Duke and other universities, carried his music all over the USA and to Europe and the Far East, making Tommy a world folklore figure. After 1966 he was recorded several times as a solo artist or with his friend, banjoist Fred Cockerham or other musicians. Several videos of Tommy are currently available on You Tube, including a piece with the great Shetlands fiddler Aly Bain.</p> <p>Over the years <i>June Apple</i> has become a popular jam tune, but it is often played in a somewhat different style than Tommy used. The changes are somewhat controversial, as they tend towards what some people call ‘Festival Style.’ As more and more trained musicians play old time music, and as people from all parts of the country are constantly mixing and mingling at the festivals and campground jams at the famous fiddling sites such as Port Townsend, Clifftop, Weiser, etc. some popular tunes have lost some of their regional identities. They are played the same by fiddlers from Washington, Maine, California or Virginia. To some extent this is a good thing, since it makes it possible for all these folks to play together. But on the other hand some tunes are fun to play just because of the little quirks of style that regional players add, and it would be too bad to lose those quirks...</p> <p>Another interesting tune which has largely avoided this ‘festival-izing’ is ‘<i>New Castle</i>’ from the Glen Lyn, VA fiddler Henry Reed. Reed played this tune for folklorist Alan Jabbour around 1966. At first Reed called it ‘<i>Texas</i>’ and when Jabbour’s band issued their “Hollow Rock String Band” album they recorded it under that title. Later, Henry changed his mind and decided that the correct name for the tune was ‘<i>Newcastle</i>’ but the Hollow Rock album was already known all over the country. Another tune from Reed that was on this album was the previously unrecorded “<i>Over the Waterfall</i>.” A year after the album was released, Jabbour graduated with his folklore PhD from Duke and went to UCLA to teach. Alan told me that soon after his arrival in L.A. he was asked to judge the Topanga Fiddle Contest. The first tune played was “<i>Over the Waterfall</i>” learned from his album. This is now one of the most commonly played tunes. Other Henry Reed tunes which are now played widely are Ducks on the Pond, Kitchen Girl, Santa Anna’s Retreat, etc.</p>
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June Apple from Tommy Jarrell transcription: Milliner Koken Collection of American Fiddle Tunes. Tommy played this tune in an AEAE cross tuning. Note that the high G# notes are marked to be G notes ('natural' no sharp). So the first part of the tune is 'modal', that is, in A mixolydian rather than A major. Or, at least partly so....



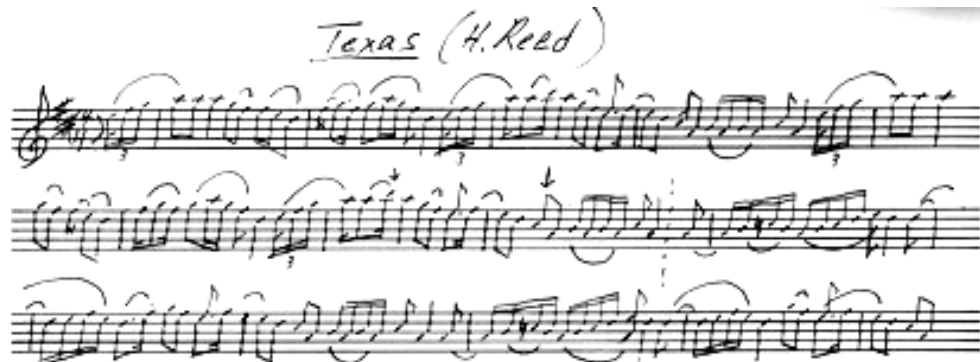
June Apple a more standardized, or 'festival-ized' version. Note that the key signature is 2 sharps – we would read that as key of 'D' but the tune starts on E and ends on A in both parts. D tunes don't do that. It is A mixolydian.



New Castle (or, Texas) from Henry Reed transcription from Milliner Koken. Because of numerous issues related to the quirky timings and intonations of many fiddle tunes, Clare Milliner decided to notate these tunes by using an A key signature and then marking the notes which are flatted. You see that G# is made G in the first part of the tune, and C# and G# made C and G in the second part. That is, the first part is A mixolydian, and the second part A dorian.



This is a great example of the way a tune's odd features can make it fun and interesting. This tune is odd in its scale, but also in its measures – while most fiddle tunes have an A part of 16 beats and a B part of 16 beats, this tune has an A part of 17 beats and a B part of 13 beats. Tunes that count with missing or extra beats are called “crooked.” This tune is ‘crooked on both ends.’



Alan Jabbour's original 1966 transcriptions of Henry Reed's music above, can be found on the web site of the US Library of Congress (search for “Fiddle Tunes of the Old Frontier”). Both Tommy Jarrell's *June Apple* and Henry Reed's *New Castle* can be found, along with audio of more than 1000 other primitive early commercial cylinder or disk field recordings on the website at slippery-hill.com.