

FINGERING

FOR THE

ACCORDION

December 2018 Edition

Robert L. Smith

Subject: Fingering for the Accordion (Revised)
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Date Received: Friday, January 18, 2019 4:01:56 PM GMT-08:00
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Dear Accordion Lover,

Attached is the (First?) revision of my Book. Changes are based on proof reading by one of my loyal supporters, Joel Weber.

Please delete the previous version of my book. If you find any errors, especially in the fingering, please let me know.

As in the previous version, the book may be freely copied.

Robert L Smith

FINGERING

FOR THE

ACCORDION

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Robert L. Smith

Dear Robert:

November 22, 2003

I want to congratulate you on your book "Fingering for the Accordion" which I received a couple of days ago.

I will say that you have covered the subject quite thoroughly. You also allow for an alternate of opinion.

I believe that it would be worthwhile for any serious accordionist to obtain the book and thereby enlarge his or her opinion on their technique for the instrument.

Truly yours,

Anthony Galla-Rini

Anthony Galla-Rini
President-emeritus, A.T.G.



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Fingering for the Accordion

Robert L. Smith
December 2018

Introduction

“More is lost through poor fingering than can be replaced by all conceivable artistry and good taste.” C.P.E. Bach [1]

Good fingering technique for the piano accordion is essential for smooth legato passages and for fast runs. It also aids good articulation. There are many different techniques, but often only a few basic ones are ever taught. Some good accordionists discover some methods on their own, but seldom pass them on. It is the intent of this article to present a variety of techniques as suggestions for study. It is not meant to replace any fingering techniques that you currently use, but rather to add to your repertoire of techniques to select from when working out fingering for new pieces. It is also suggested that some of these techniques be considered as possible teaching topics to widen the student's mind for alternative fingerings. This tract is not written in stone. If you find that some fingerings are too difficult, you may certainly ignore them in favor of better alternatives. If you find better methods, please let me (and others) know. Be inventive. Remember the story about Mozart as a child who found that he could not reach a range of notes with his small sized hand. In desperation he used his nose as a substitute for a finger!*

It is worth noting that everyone's hands are different. Some have thin fingers and others have fat fingers. Some hands can reach farther than others. Women typically have smaller hands than men. There are common genetically related conditions of tendon connections, which make certain combinations of finger movements difficult. What is comfortable for me may be difficult or impossible for you, and vice versa. Part of our goal is to discover fingering that requires the least amount of excess movement and the most comfort while playing. That should help the performer to carry his musical message to his audience.

A great artist once said: There is only one good fingering, the one that suits you. You will find a number of alternative fingerings in this book. That will give you different choices to help you discover the best fingering for you.

* I cannot verify this story – but it may have come from a related story in which Mozart bet a case of champagne that Haydn could not play at sight a piece that he had composed that afternoon. Haydn accepted the bet, but stopped after only a few bars. The piece had a chord with notes at each end of the harpsichord and one in the middle. Haydn claimed that no one could play this with only two hands. Mozart proceeded to show how to do it by playing the middle note with his nose! Haydn conceded the bet, saying, “With a nose like yours, it becomes easier.”

Basic Technique

Fundamentals

There are very few good references on fingering techniques specifically for the accordion. A fairly recent reference is "Jazz Theory and Improvisation Studies for Accordion" by Ralph Stricker [2]. Another possible choice is "A Collection of Lectures for Accordionists" by Anthony Galla-Rini [3]. Charles Nunzio [4] has a good collection of exercises augmented with fingering for scales and arpeggios. A good method book is the "Palmer-Hughes Accordion Course" [5]. Anzaghi [6] has a good book available in English, Spanish and Italian. It is the only book in English that has fingering for both the piano accordion and the chromatic accordion. A Spanish reference is "Metodo Completo para el studio del acordeon a piano" by Gesualdo [20].

A very useful reference is the book "Organ Essentials" by Dr. Don Cook [7]. The choice of a reference relating to the organ rather than the piano is quite deliberate, as the piano accordion is much more similar to the organ than the piano. The piano is a percussive instrument, requiring the keys to be struck, rather than merely depressed. The sounds of the accordion are essentially continuous, as in an organ, as long as the keys are depressed and the bellows are moving. Consequently, fingerings for the organ tend to be more appropriate for the accordion than those taken from piano methodology. The main differences between the organ and the treble side of the accordion are (1) the accordion keyboard is smaller in size (typically 13 % smaller), (2) there are fewer keys on the accordion, (3) only the right hand is used on the accordion keyboard, (4) because of the vertical keyboard, the range of hand, wrist and arm motion is more restricted on the accordion, and (5) the angle between the arm and the keyboard is more acute on the high note part of the accordion keyboard than on other instruments with a horizontal keyboard. Some of the fingerings shown below may well apply to other keyboard instruments, but the emphasis is on the piano accordion.

The amount that you can twist your wrist relative to the keyboard relates directly to your ability to manipulate your fingers in order to play difficult passages. I have made the following measurements for my arms and hands. Relative to a normal horizontal piano keyboard, and with flattened fingers (in order to maximize the range), I can rotate my hand about 95 degrees in the counter-clockwise direction, and about 80 degrees in the clock-wise direction. With my piano accordion keyboard in a nearly vertical position, located as far to the left as possible, and near the top of the keyboard, I can rotate my fingers from 60 degrees counter-clockwise to 95 degrees clockwise. At the bottom of the keyboard (near the highest notes), my range is much more restricted, going from 15 degrees counter-clockwise to 100 degrees clockwise. Conclusion: the piano accordion is **NOT** a piano.

To appreciate the difference between the accordion keyboard and the piano keyboard, I invite you to the following test. Play each measure of Figure 1 on the piano (or other horizontal keyboard) and record the level of difficulty of playing each measure. Each measure is to be played in strict legato style, where the first note is to be released just as the following note begins. Use exactly the fingering specified. Then repeat the exact same exercise on the piano accordion. I suggest the following levels of difficulty:

- 1: Easy
- 2: A little difficult
- 3: Somewhat difficult
- 4: Very difficult
- 5: Impossible

Figure 1: Fingering Test

You can then compare the results to see if you find a significant difference between the two keyboards. I found that for all cases except the first measure that the degree of difficulty was higher on the accordion than for the piano. My conclusion is that the best fingering for the piano is not necessarily the best fingering for the accordion. **The piano accordion is NOT a piano!**

Proper positioning of the accordion on the body may ameliorate some of the difficulties of fingering on the piano accordion. Contemporary practice places the right hand keyboard vertically under the chin. I have observed that many accordionists end up with the keyboard shifted to the right, often leading to poor hand and wrist positioning. The shift is partly due to the mounting of the right strap at the top of the accordion. One solution is to add a right strap fixture to the top of the keyboard. An example is shown in Figure 2.



Figure 2: Modified Strap Fixture

Please note that the arm should always be positioned so that the wrist is straight with respect to the arm. The wrist should never be bent at a sharp angle, which would restrict the movement of the fingers.

In the following sections we will consider the basic techniques of fingering for the right hand.

Direct Fingering

The simplest form of direct fingering is where adjacent keys are played with adjacent fingers, or stretching or compressing the hand without the use of other techniques.

Finger Slip

Finger slip is a slipping or sliding of any of the five fingers from a black key to an adjacent white key in order to obtain a legato between the two notes. In organ method books, Finger Slip is called "Finger Glissando" and is not to be confused with a normal glissando where a sequence of keys is rapidly played in sequence by sliding one or more fingers upward or downward on the keyboard. When fingering is indicated on sheet music, finger slip may be indicated by a dash either following the finger specified for the first note in the sequence, or preceding the finger for the second note.

Finger Crossing

Pianists and accordionists are familiar with the concept of passing the thumb under other fingers or other fingers over the thumb. Organists (and by extension, accordionists) need to use other fingering crossings, especially for legato passages. Pianists can merely hold down the sustaining pedal to get an approximation to a legato sound, even if they are actually fingering staccato. Accordionists and organists do not have that luxury. A smooth legato occurs when a successive note starts just as its preceding note stops, with no obvious break in the sound. But sometimes finger crossing can be of use in non-legato or even staccato passages. Although the fifth finger is much weaker than the thumb, it is second only to the thumb in terms of range of motion and the ability to pass under other fingers. Please note that even pianists sometimes use finger crossings involving the fifth finger.

A rare, unusual and highly controversial variation of finger crossing allows the thumb to cross *over* the 4th or 5th finger. I would place the level of difficulty of this maneuver as noticeably easier than that of crossing the thumb under the 5th finger, as suggested by Nunzio [4]. I should note that crossing the thumb under the 5th finger was disparaged by C. P. E. Bach [1].

On rare occasions, I have found it useful to cross my thumb over the second finger while moving from a white key to the next adjacent sharp black key.

Finger Substitution

Finger substitution is the technique of holding down a key while replacing one finger by another. This substitution may be used to free up the first finger or to place the hand in a more advantageous position for the next note. When fingering is indicated on sheet music, finger substitution is usually indicated by a dash between finger numbers associated with the note.

Thumb Glide

The thumb glide uses the tip and base of the thumb to obtain a legato between two adjacent notes. When this technique can be used, the effect is as if the thumb became two fingers. On the organ, this technique is called "thumb glissando," and should not be confused with a normal glissando. The technique is rarely used on the piano, but Chopin is known to have used it on occasion. A thumb glide is usually applied between adjacent white keys, but can also be applied between adjacent black keys. If your thumb is sufficiently slim or agile, it can be used to move smoothly from a white key to an adjacent black key. When a thumb slips from a black key to a white one, it is called a "finger slip," rather than a thumb glide. The thumb glide is indicated by a dash before the fingering number as -1, in a manner similar to the dash used to indicate finger substitution.

A simple exercise is to play a scale in the key of C in legato style, but using only the thumb. One can then progress to scales in other keys. The latter is more difficult to execute, but is worth learning. Refer to a good book on organ technique for further suggestions.

Glissando

Glissando is a sliding of one or more fingers from one key to another to achieve a legato style. It is normally used to move from a white key to sequentially adjacent white keys. This technique is usually disparaged in classical work.

Finger Extension

Finger extension is playing more than one note with the same finger. It is a fairly rare technique, but is worth remembering. It is usually accomplished with the thumb depressing two adjacent keys of the same color. That may occur when playing extended chords.

Finger Slide

Finger slide is merely sliding a finger either toward or away from the edge of the keyboard in order to make room for other fingers on the following note or notes. This is particularly useful when playing legato thirds or chords.

Old Style Fingering

Until the early part of the 18th century, the thumb was rarely used on the keyboard, except when it was needed for large separations as in playing octaves. In the "old style", the hands were generally held relatively high above the keyboard, and the fingers did the walking. The usual procedure when playing an ascending scale was to twist the wrist clockwise, and use the third and fourth fingers on most of the notes of the scale. When descending, the wrist was twisted counterclockwise and the second and third fingers were mainly used on the notes of the scale. Finger crossing was fairly common. The practice of moving the thumb under one or more of the other fingers apparently was known by Scarlatti, and certainly to Maichelbeck [16], although not known to most of the musicians of the time. J. S. Bach was an eager adaptor of the new technique, and that probably gave him a technological edge over his compatriots. However, the old style fingering was not completely ignored. Chopin often reverted back to old style fingering when he found it more convenient. And Bach himself is known to have sometimes used old style fingering. One of Bach's sons, C. P. E. Bach [1] published a book that became the basis of modern fingering. His suggested fingerings for the ascending C scale are shown in Figure 3. Note that the middle example shows old style fingering as quite acceptable. I would suggest that if it was good enough for Bach and Chopin, it might be good enough for you to at least consider.

C Scale Fingering

by C. P. E. Bach

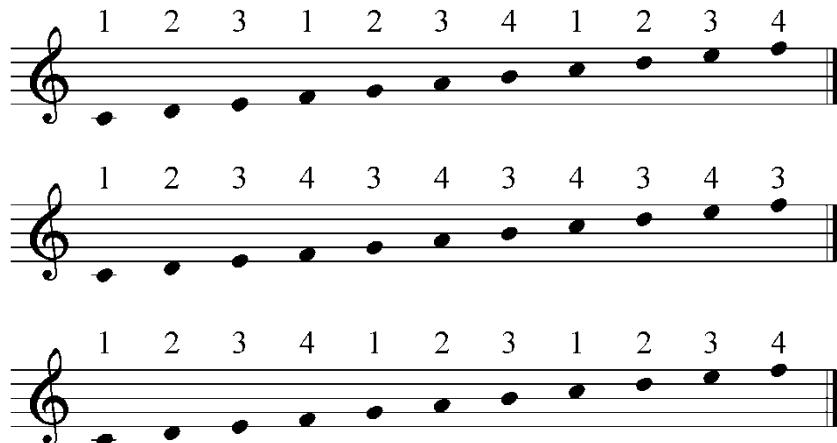


Figure 3: Alternate fingerings for ascending C scale, by C. P. E. Bach

Variation on Old Style Fingering

There are certain problems with old style fingering on the accordion because it is difficult to raise the wrist far above the keyboard, and then further to twist the wrist, especially in the counter-clockwise direction. Some accordionists have discovered a modification of the old style fingering. In this method, the hand is held rather flat, and the fingers sort of crawl or slither along the keyboard. In certain cases, the speed and accuracy seems to be improved with this technique.

One example of the variation on old style fingering was shown to me by Steve Cannata. Figure 4 shows a fragment of “Flight of the Angels” using the 4th finger in an unconventional manner. This seems to me to be the best way to play the passage.

A musical fragment in 3/4 time, treble and bass staves. The treble staff shows a series of eighth-note chords with fingerings: 3, 4, 3, 2, 4, 3; 1, 2, 3; 3, 1, 3, 1; 3, 1, 3, 1; 3, 4, 3, 2, 4, 3; 1, 2, 3; 3, 1, 3, 1; 3, 1, 3, 1. The bass staff shows notes GM and D7. The bass staff has a measure of rests followed by notes GM and D7.

Figure 4: Fragment from “Flight of the Angels”

Fingering Repeated Notes

The general rule for notes that are repeated is that different fingers should be used on successive repetitions of the note for improved articulation and clarity. This rule cannot always be observed, but it should certainly be considered.

There are three common fingerings for playing rapidly repeated notes. The suggested sequences are (2 1), (3 2 1), and 4 3 2 1). The choice of the pattern depends on the desired timing as gleaned from the score. For (2 1) fingering the thumb is placed underneath the second finger and the second finger and thumb are then played alternately. For the other fingerings, the higher numbered finger hits the key and then moves toward the wrist and the next lower numbered finger then strikes the key with a slight rotating motion toward the wrist. As the thumb plays the note, the highest numbered finger is brought forward to begin the cycle over again, if required. The wrist is held nearly motionless during the operation. Do not brush or sweep the keys with your fingers. (This description is based on discussions with Don Komorski.)

Redistribution

Redistribution is the technique moving the playing of some notes from the right hand to the left hand, or vice versa. It is a technique that often occurs on the organ and the piano, and may be used on accordions with a chromatic bass. It is fairly rare on the standard piano accordion. It can work on the standard piano accordion where other bass work is not required, and the choice of bass and treble switches allows for a similar tone for the bass and treble sides.

Single Note Scales

Major Scales

Scales, or at least parts of scales, occur frequently in music. It is therefore convenient to explore alternative fingering for scales. The reference for standard piano fingering is "Scale and Arpeggio Manual" by Walter MacFarren [9]. With few exceptions, the same fingering can be found in "Hanon for the Accordion, Book 2" by Nunzio [4]. For reference, Figure 5 shows the "standard" piano fingering for the Major Scales in all of the keys. These are the fingerings that are usually taught to accordionists.

Major Scales

Standard Piano Fingering

C Major

G Major

D Major

A Major

E Major

B Major

F# Major

F Major

Bb Major

Eb Major

Ab Major

Db Major

* Hanon suggests the 3rd finger here.

Figure 5: Standard Piano Fingering for Major Scales

There is an interesting trade-off between the standard and alternative fingerings for the keys of G, D, A, and E. The alternative fingerings avoid the slightly awkward 4th finger on a black key followed by the thumb on the next white key. The substitution puts the 4th finger and then the thumb on two adjacent white keys. You will have to decide for yourself which fingering is easier for you. As a point of historical interest, C. P. E. Bach [1] gives 3 fingerings for the G scale with the now standard fingering as the least desirable and the alternative shown here as the most desirable.

Fingering for five of the keys involves using the fourth finger on the note of B-flat and the thumb on C. That is more difficult on the accordion than on the piano or organ, requiring a large and awkward twist of the wrist and a difficult stretch of the fingers, particularly in the higher octaves. It is especially difficult for people with small hands when playing legato. In many cases, changing the fingering can reduce this awkwardness. Figure 6 shows a set of possible alternative fingerings for some keys. You may find, as I have, that the alternative fingering can be executed more easily, and consequently smoother and faster. For most of the flat scales, probably the easiest sets to remember begin with the finger sequence 2, 3, and 1. The F scale is particularly difficult to handle. Since the scale begins on a white key, it is very useful to begin with the thumb. However, if more than one octave is used, the alternative begins with finger 2 on the following octaves. Finally, consider the suggestion for fingering the G-flat and D-flat scales. This fingering is so unusual that it cannot be recommended (and will undoubtedly offend some), but it is an interesting possibility for the ascending scales. The fingering for the ascending scales are somewhat easier than for the standard fingering, but the descending version proves to be more difficult.

For my hand, I find that the alternative fingerings shown for the keys of B-flat, E-flat, and A-flat are easier to play than the “standard” fingerings. In my opinion, the alternative E-flat and A-flat fingerings starting with the 2 3 1 sequence are better than the standard fingerings, at least on the piano accordion. In addition, they are more consistent. The standard B-flat scale is slightly better for the **single octave** case, but any of the alternatives are better for the multiple octave case. I suggest that you make the comparisons for yourself.

Major Scales

Alternative Fingering

G Major

D Major

A Major

E Major

F# Major

F Major

Bb Major

Eb Major

Ab Major

Db Major

Figure 6: Alternative Fingering for Major Scales

Minor Scales

Harmonic Minor Scales Standard Piano Fingering(Hanon)

A Minor

E Minor

B Minor

F# Minor

C# Minor

G# Minor

D Minor

G Minor

C Minor

F Minor

Bb Minor

Eb Minor

Figure 7: Standard Fingering for Harmonic Minor Scales

The two most common minor scales are the Harmonic Minor and the Melodic Minor. The standard fingering for the Harmonic Minor is shown in Figure 7. Some suggested alternatives for four of these scales are shown in Figure 8. I am not completely happy with some of these alternatives. Feel free to ignore them or modify them.

Harmonic Minor Scales Alternative Fingering

The figure consists of four staves of musical notation, each representing a different harmonic minor scale. The staves are arranged vertically, corresponding to the keys: G Minor, C Minor, F Minor, and B-flat Minor. Each staff shows a sequence of notes with specific fingerings indicated by numbers above them. The fingerings are designed to facilitate playing the scales on a guitar or similar instrument. The notation includes quarter notes and eighth notes, with various slurs and grace notes. The first staff (G Minor) starts with a key signature of one flat, while the others start with no sharps or flats. The fingerings are numbered 1 through 5, with some numbers appearing twice to indicate specific finger placement on certain notes.

Figure 8: Alternative Fingering for Harmonic Minor Scales

The Melodic Minor uses different notes for the ascending and descending parts of the scale. The standard fingering is shown in Figure 9.

Melodic Minor Scales

Standard Piano Fingering(Hanon)

A Minor

E Minor

B Minor

F# Minor

C# Minor

G# Minor

D Minor

G Minor

C Minor

F Minor

Bb Minor

Eb Minor

Figure 9: Standard Fingering for Melodic Minor Scales

Melodic Minor Scales

Alternative Fingering

Figure 10: Alternative Fingering for Melodic Minor Scales

Some of the scales have the awkward 4th finger on B-flat to the thumb on C or the equally awkward 4th finger on E-flat to the thumb on F. Some possible alternative fingerings are shown in Figure 10. Note that the fingering marked as -1 implies a thumb glide from the previous note.

Chromatic Scales

Figure 11 shows the standard fingering for the chromatic scale. There are a number of alternative fingerings for this. The simplest variation from the standard is to replace the sequence of 1 3 with 1 2. For faster execution, consider minimizing the number of thumb undercrossings. MacFarren [9] suggests the fingering shown in Figure 12. The advantage of MacFarren's method is that the fingering repeats at the octave. A disadvantage is that it is difficult to memorize. If we drop the requirement that the fingerings be repeated for each octave, we can make the memorization fairly easy for a two-octave scale. Figure 13 shows one possibility. Note that the number of thumb undercrossings is reduced further. The fingering in Figure 13 seems to be easier to remember. The pattern is 1 2, 1 2 3, 1 2 3 4, 1 2 3. This pattern is repeated for each octave.



Figure 11: Standard Fingering for the Chromatic Scale (MacFarren)



Figure 12: MacFarren's Alternative Chromatic Scale Fingering



Figure 13: Second Alternative Chromatic Scale Fingering

If we give up the requirement that the fingering pattern be repeated for each octave, we can use the third alternative pattern shown in Figure 14. To simplify the explanation, the sequence is started on D. The sequence is: 1 2 3, 1 2 3 4. This pattern is repeated until the top note is reached. This pattern is even easier to remember than the previous pattern. This fingering has one disadvantage, namely that it cannot be followed indefinitely. If it is continued, an error will occur after the F in the third octave. It would be necessary to change the fingering at that point. Note that you can easily add to the start of this suggestion to begin at C.



Figure 14: Third Alternative Chromatic Scale Fingering

Figure 15 appears to be a method for playing the chromatic scale very rapidly. According to Allen Klein, he developed this method when he was about 6 years old! He uses this only on the ascending scale, but prefers to use the standard method on the descending portion. I am impressed with this work!



Figure 15: Chromatic Scale – The Klein Method

The Octave Problem

In order to simplify the extension of scales to multiple octaves, scale fingerings are usually constructed so that they start and end on the same finger. This sometimes causes some difficulty. If difficulty arises, the following list of suggestions can be considered:

A: Ignore

It is not written in stone that you must start and end an octave run with the same finger. If it works out better to use different fingering in a particular situation, go ahead.

B: Finger Substitution

If speed of execution is not a consideration, one or more finger substitutions can be used within each octave.

C: Thumb Glide

The thumb glide can be easily applied when there are two adjacent white keys in the scale. That can restore the “polarity” of the fingers. To take a simple example, for the C-Major scale use the sequence: 1 2 3 1 -1 2 3 1.

D: Finger Slip

Finger slip can be used on scales, but there are very few places where it can be used effectively on both ascending and descending scales.

E: Two-Octave Repeat

Sometimes fingering can be worked out so that the repetition of fingering occurs after two octaves.

Arpeggios

Figure 16 shows the Standard Fingering for Major arpeggios that start on the root note. In a few cases MacFarren [9] gives alternative fingerings. In those cases I have taken the fingering that appears to be easier on the accordion. For my hand, I find that all of the standard arpeggio fingerings are difficult to execute smoothly on the accordion, particularly for most of the flat keys. Some suggestions for alternative fingerings are shown in Figure 17. Because fingering for arpeggios is nearly identical for many keys, I have shown fingering for only a few cases. The extension to other keys should be obvious. For the key of F-sharp, the fingerings for the white key arpeggios may be used. Please note that these fingerings are merely suggestions. If you do not find them useful, then don't use them.

Major Chord Arpeggios
Standard Piano Fingering

The sheet music displays eight staves, each representing a different major key: C, D, E, F#, G, A, B, and E-flat. Each staff shows a single-line arpeggio starting on the root note. Fingerings are indicated above the notes, using numbers 1 through 5 to denote the fingers used for each note. The keys are arranged vertically from left to right: C, D, E, F#, G, A, B, and E-flat. The fingering patterns generally follow a repeating sequence of three or four notes per measure, with variations in the final measure of each staff.

Figure 16: Major Chord Arpeggios – Standard Fingering

Major Chord Arpeggios

Alternative Fingerings

White key roots, medium hand:



White key roots, small hand:



White key roots, unusual fingering:



Flat keys (other than F):



Key of F#:



Figure 17: Major Chord Arpeggios – Alternative Fingerings

Standard fingering for minor scale arpeggios is shown in Figure 18. Some suggested alternatives are shown in Figure 19. As in the case of the major chord arpeggios, the same fingerings are suggested for a range of keys, but only one key is shown.

Minor Chord Arpeggios

Standard Piano Fingering

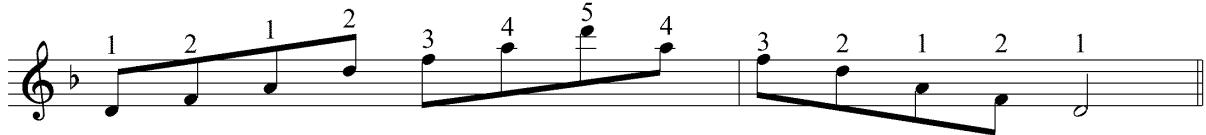
The image displays a grid of piano sheet music examples, each showing a specific minor key and its corresponding arpeggio pattern. The keys are arranged in two columns and four rows. The first column contains C Minor, D Minor, E Minor, and F# Minor. The second column contains G Minor, A Minor, B Minor, and C Minor. The third column contains F Minor, Bb Minor, Eb Minor, and Ab Minor. The fourth column contains C# Minor, Db Minor, F# Minor, and Gb Minor. Each example includes a treble clef, a key signature, and a 4/4 time signature. The arpeggios are shown with black dots representing notes and numbers above them indicating the standard piano fingering: 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5.

Figure 18: Minor Chord Arpeggios – Standard Fingering

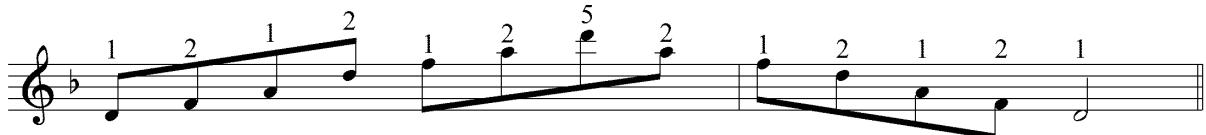
Minor Chord Arpeggios

Alternative Fingerings

Fm, Cm, Gm, Dm, Am, Em , E \flat m (medium hand):



Dm, Am, Em (small hand)



Fm, Cm, Gm, Dm, Am, Em (unusual #1)



Fm, Cm, Gm, Dm, Am, Em (unusual #2)



A \flat m, D \flat m , G \flat m=F \sharp m



Figure 19: Minor Chord Arpeggios – Alternative Fingerings

Parallel Scales

Thirds on Major Scales

The most frequently encountered type of parallel scale is thirds upon a major scale. The standard piano fingering for thirds on a major scale is shown in Figure 20.

Standard Fingering of Major Scales in Thirds

C Major

G Major

D Major

A Major

E Major

B Major

F# Major

F Major

Bb Major

Eb Major

Ab Major

Db Major

This block contains 12 sets of piano staves, each showing a different major scale (C, G, D, A, E, B, F#, F, Bb, Eb, Ab, Db) in third-finger position. Each staff shows a sequence of eighth-note chords with specific fingering numbers (1, 2, 3, 4) above them. The scales are presented in a repeating pattern across the staves.

Figure 20: Standard Piano Fingering for Thirds on a Major Scale

(For reference only)

There are many problems with the standard fingering when legato playing is needed. **NOT ONE** of the standard fingerings can be played in true legato style. I cannot recommend any of them. Some of the problems are indicated in Figure 20 by showing the fingering in **bold**.

The playing of thirds on a scale is considered an advanced topic for pianists. For me, proper playing of thirds on a scale is the main reason that I wrote this book. So let me be perfectly clear. Let me begin by showing a different version of the keyboard:

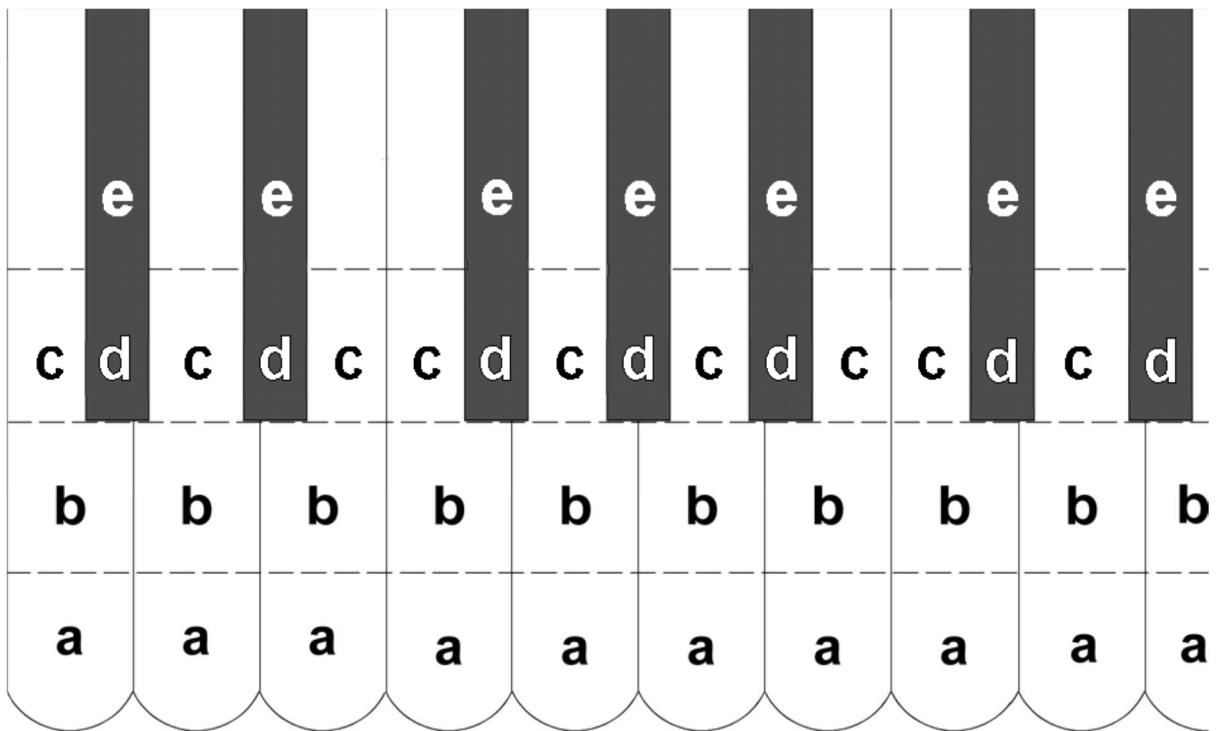


Figure 21: Keyboard showing different parts of the keys

The simplest and most obvious way to play thirds on the C major scale is:

1a\3b 2b\4a 1a\3b 2b\4a, etc.

That is, each finger has a place to be to avoid interference with the next note. I call this sequence the “spider.” That sequence can be continued both up and down the keyboard.

Another simple way to play thirds on the C major scale is:

1a\5a 4b\2b 1a\5a 4b\2b, etc.

I call this the “sidewinder.” Again, that sequence can be continued up and down the keyboard.

Here are these two methods shown on standard staves:

Thirds on the C Major Scale Alternative Fingering

The "Spider"

The "Sidewinder"

Figure 22: Thirds on the C Major Scale - Alternatives

Both of these methods are useful. The “Spider” is perhaps slightly faster than the “Sidewinder.” The “Sidewinder” is often taught to organists. See, for example, “Organ Essentials”, Dr. Don Cook [7]). If the major scale is to be played in thirds over a range of an octave or less, the best fingering will generally use the “sidewinder.” On some of the scales below a 1\3 fingering is shown when it appears to be a little easier. For my hands, I find the version in D-flat to be the most difficult to play. In most keys, the Sidewinder appears more often than the Spider.

Major Scales in Thirds

One Octave - Alternate Fingering

Figure 23: Thirds on a Major Scale – Alternatives for one octave

Let us now consider scales greater than an octave. You might have noticed in the above figure that the fingering pair at the low octave is different at the high octave. I call this a “parity” problem, which results from alternating the thumb and second finger on a scale, but since a basic scale has only 7 unique notes, a thumb at one octave results in the second finger at the next octave. Probably the easiest solution for the accordion or the organ is to use a finger slip, especially if the adjacent notes to be used are on white keys. A typical “parity conversion” sequence might use the Thumb Glide method:

1a\3b -1a\5a 2b\4b-a 1a\3b (ascending or descending)

Note that the “4b-a” implies a finger slip, which allows the fourth finger to move out of the way for the third finger. For the piano or old accordions with rather deep key depressions key edges, it may be necessary to slightly complicate this with the Finger Substitution method as follows:

1a\3b 2b-1a\5a 2b\4b-a (ascending) or
1a\3b 2b-1a\5a 2b\4a (descending)

Lest there be any confusion, I show these methods on a standard C scale for both the spider and sidewinder:

Parity Conversion (Based on the Spider)

Thumb Slip Method:

Finger Substitution Method:

Figure 24: Parity Conversion Method on the Spider

Parity Conversion (Based on the Sidewinder)

Thumb Slip Method:

Finger Substitution Method:

Figure 25: Parity Conversion Method on the Sidewinder

For pianists, I believe that the Finger Substitution method shown here is superior to the 3\5 1\3 method usually taught. It allows for true legato playing, appears to be faster and allows for percussive attack of the keys. For organists and accordionists, I think that the Thumb Slip method is generally to be preferred.

Let us now consider keys other than C. Consider the following alternative fingerings as a starting point. You may experiment and find better alternatives for your hands.

Major Scales in Thirds

Alternative Fingering for Flat Keys

F Major

B♭ Major

E♭ Major
Alt. 1

E♭ Major
Alt. 2

A♭ Major

D♭ Major

Figure 26: Alternative Fingering for Flat Major Scales in Two Octaves

Major Scales in Thirds Alternative Fingering for Sharp Keys

The figure displays six staves of musical notation for the right hand of an accordion, arranged vertically. Each staff represents a different sharp key: G Major, D Major, A Major, E Major, B Major, and F# Major. Each staff consists of two measures of music. Above each staff, the key signature and name are indicated. Below each measure, a sequence of numbers (e.g., 3, 5, 4, 5, 4, 5) represents the alternative fingering for each note. The fingering is designed to facilitate playing major scales in thirds.

Figure 27: Alternative Fingering for Sharp Major Scales in Two Octaves

The techniques shown here have much to offer. The method is fairly easy to learn, and when properly applied will improve your playing of thirds. The method is used and approved by good and great organists. Since it is unknown to most accordionists, you will be ahead of them in this area.

Some of the above scales, especially those with a large number of black keys, are somewhat difficult to play. If you can discover better fingering, please let me know.

Thirds on Harmonic Minor Scales

The standard piano fingering for thirds on harmonic minor scales is shown in Figure 28. Again we find that the standard fingering cannot be played in true legato style.

Thirds on Harmonic Minor Scales

Standard Fingering

A Minor

E Minor

B Minor

F# Minor

C# Minor

G# Minor

D# Minor

D Minor

G Minor

C Minor

F Minor

Bb Minor

Figure 28: Standard Piano Fingering for Thirds on a Harmonic Minor Scale

Because of the nature of the harmonic minor scale, I found it difficult to figure out good legato fingering for some of the keys. For the C-sharp and G-sharp keys, I found it necessary to use finger substitution. My suggestions are shown in figures 29 and 30.

Thirds on Harmonic Minor Scales Alternative Fingering - Part 1

The sheet music displays six staves, each representing a different harmonic minor key. The keys are: A Minor, E Minor, B Minor, F# Minor, C# Minor, and G# Minor. Each staff consists of a series of third-position chords. Above each note in the chords, there are fingerings indicating the fingers to be used for each note. The fingerings use numbers 1 through 5, with '-1' indicating a substitute finger. The music is in common time with a treble clef.

Figure 29: Fingering for Thirds on a Harmonic Minor Scale – Alternative Part 1

Thirds on Harmonic Minor Scales Alternative Fingering - Part 2

The figure consists of six staves of musical notation, each representing a different harmonic minor scale. The scales are:

- D[#] Minor: Key signature of three sharps. Fingerings: 3 4 5 4, 5 4, 5 4, 5 4, 5 4, 5 4, 5 4, 5 4, 5 4, 5 4, 5 4, 5 4, 5 4, 5 4.
- D Minor: Key signature of one flat. Fingerings: 3 5 4 3, 4 5, 4 3, 5 4, 3 4, 5 4, 3 4, 5 4, 3 4, 5 4, 3 4, 5 4, 3 4, 5 4.
- G Minor: Key signature of one flat. Fingerings: 3 5 4 3, 4 5, 4 3, 5 4, 3 4, 5 4, 3 4, 5 4, 3 4, 5 4, 3 4, 5 4, 3 4, 5 4.
- C Minor: Key signature of one flat. Fingerings: 4 5 4 3, 5 4, 5 4, 5 4, 5 4, 5 4, 5 4, 5 4, 5 4, 5 4, 5 4, 5 4, 5 4, 5 4.
- F Minor: Key signature of one flat. Fingerings: 3 4 5 4, 5 4, 5 4, 5 4, 5 4, 5 4, 5 4, 5 4, 5 4, 5 4, 5 4, 5 4, 5 4, 5 4.
- B^b Minor: Key signature of two flats. Fingerings: 4 5 4 5, 4 5, 4 5, 4 5, 4 5, 4 5, 4 5, 4 5, 4 5, 4 5, 4 5, 4 5, 4 5.

Figure 30: Fingering for Thirds on a Harmonic Minor Scale – Alternative Part 2

Thirds on a Whole Tone Scale

The “Whole Tone” scale has no tonal center. It can be used in placid songs. Sometimes a sequence of thirds on a whole tone scale may be seen. The best legato fingering for thirds on a whole tone scale is the usual 1-5 and 2-4 fingering as shown in Figure 31.

Thirds on a Whole Tone Scale

A single staff of musical notation showing a sequence of thirds on a whole tone scale. The scale consists of the notes A, B, C, D, E, F, G, A. Fingerings are indicated by numbers above the notes: 5 1, 4 2, 5 1, 4 2, 5 1, 4 2, 5 1, 4 2, 5 1, 4 2, 5 1, 4 2, 5 1.

Figure 31: Fingering for Thirds on a Whole Tone Scale

Major Thirds on a Chromatic Scale

Occasionally thirds are used on a chromatic scale. In my search for standard fingering for major thirds on a chromatic scale, I did not find it in MacFarren [9], but I did find a fingering by Magnante [13]. That is shown in Figure 32. Some alternative suggestions for legato fingering are shown in Figure 33. It seems to me that Alternative #3 is the best.

Major Thirds on a Chromatic Scale

Standard Fingering (Magnante)

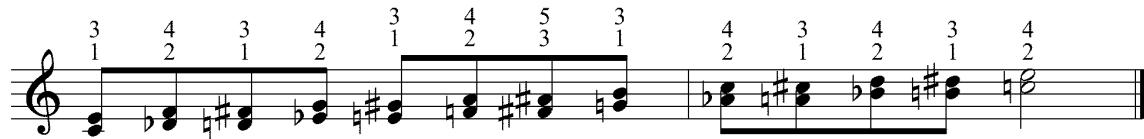


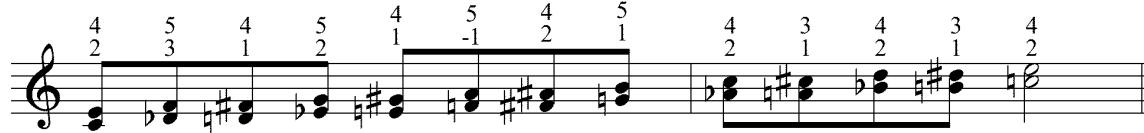
Figure 32: Standard Fingering for Major Thirds on a Chromatic Scale

Major Thirds on a Chromatic Scale

Alternate Fingering #1



Alternate Fingering #2



Alternate Fingering #3



Figure 33: Alternative Legato Fingering for Major Thirds on a Chromatic Scale

Minor Thirds on a Chromatic Scale

One of my favorite scales uses minor thirds on a chromatic scale. Standard fingering is taken from MacFarren, and is shown in Figure 34. A substantial improvement on MacFarren's fingering was discovered by Magnante [13], and is shown in Figure 35. For completeness, I should mention that Galla-Rini [8] has a somewhat similar fingering for this case, but slightly less useful. An alternative form is shown in Figure 36. You may be able to work out better fingering for your hands.

Minor Thirds on a Chromatic Scale

Standard Fingering

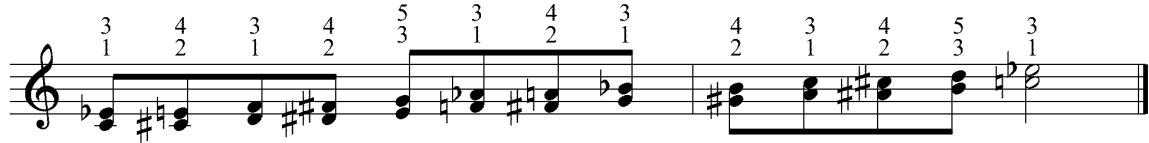


Figure 34: Standard Fingering for Minor Thirds on a Chromatic Scale

Minor Thirds on a Chromatic Scale

As suggested by Charles Magnante

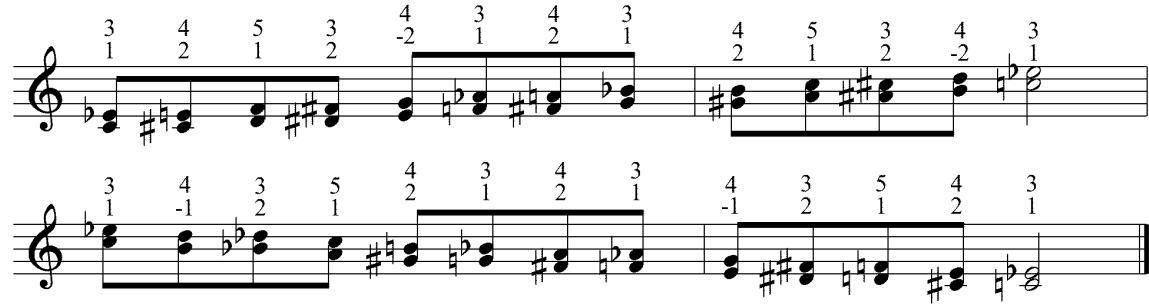


Figure 35: Fingering for Minor Thirds on a Chromatic Scale by Magnante

Minor Thirds on a Chromatic Scale

Alternative Fingering

The musical notation consists of two staves of sixteenth-note chords. The top staff is in common time (indicated by '4') and the bottom staff is in common time (indicated by '4'). The first staff shows a sequence of chords: B-flat major, A major, G major, F-sharp major, E major, D major, C major, B-flat major. Fingerings above the notes indicate a specific alternative legato fingering: 3-1, 4-2, 3-1, 4-2, 5-1, 3-1, 4-2, 3-1. The second staff shows a similar sequence of chords: B-flat major, A major, G major, F-sharp major, E major, D major, C major, B-flat major. Fingerings above the notes indicate a different alternative legato fingering: 3-1, 5-1, 4-2, 5-1, 4-2, 3-1, 4-2, 3-1.

Figure 36: Alternative Legato Fingering for Minor Thirds on a Chromatic Scale

Minor Fifths on a Chromatic Scale

For a “mysterious” sound, you may like to try playing minor fifth’s on a chromatic scale, as shown in Figure 37. I was unable to locate any “standard” fingering for this scale. My fingering here is, of course, merely suggestive.

Minor Fifths on a Chromatic Scale

The musical notation consists of two staves of sixteenth-note chords. The top staff is in common time (indicated by '4') and the bottom staff is in common time (indicated by '4'). The first staff shows a sequence of chords: B-flat major, A major, G major, F-sharp major, E major, D major, C major, B-flat major. Fingerings above the notes indicate a specific alternative legato fingering: 3-1, 5-2, 4-1, 5-2, 4-1, 5-2, 4-1, 5-2, 4-1, 5-2, 4-1, 3-1. The second staff shows a similar sequence of chords: B-flat major, A major, G major, F-sharp major, E major, D major, C major, B-flat major. Fingerings above the notes indicate a different alternative legato fingering: 3-1, 5-1, 4-2, 3-1, 5-2, 4-1, 5-2, 4-1, 5-2, 4-1, 3-1.

Figure 37: Minor Fifths on a Chromatic Scale

The Devil's Scale

Another unusual scale, based on diminished chords, is the rarely played Devil's Scale, illustrated in Figure 38. There are also two other equivalent forms, which are left to the reader to discover. Again, the fingering is merely suggestive, and other fingerings are possible. (I learned of this form of the Devil's Scale from Reno Pucci.)

The image shows three staves of musical notation for a string instrument, likely a violin or cello. The notation is tablature, where each horizontal line represents a string. The first staff uses a treble clef, the second staff an alto clef, and the third staff a bass clef. Each staff has a key signature of one sharp. The music consists of a series of eighth-note chords. Fingerings are indicated above the notes, such as '5 2' or '4 2', which refer to the fingers used on the strings. The first staff has 12 measures, the second staff has 11 measures, and the third staff has 10 measures.

Figure 38: The Devil's Scale

Chords

Galla-Rini [3] gives an excellent discussion of fingering for major and minor triads, as well as for octaves and octave spreads of triads. For chords with four or more elements, Lou Soper's [11] book is a good starting point. Figures 39 and 40 show possible fingerings for different inversions of the 6th and 7th chords. Most of these fingerings are taken from Soper's book. For other chords, see that book.

Sixth Chords

The score consists of two columns of four staves each, representing different inversions of sixteenth chords. The first column includes C6, B6, A6, and G6. The second column includes F6, E6, D6, and A6. Each staff shows a different inversion of a sixteenth chord with its corresponding fingerings (1, 2, 3, 4, 5) above the notes.

Figure 39: Fingering for Inversions of the Sixth Chords

Seventh Chord Fingering

The chart displays fingerings for the following chords:

- C7:** Root position (4, 3, 2, 1), inversions (5, 3, 2, 1) and (5, 3, 2, 1).
- B♭7:** Root position (4, 3, 2, 1), inversions (5, 3, 2, 1) and (5, 3, 2, 1).
- A♭7:** Root position (4, 3, 2, 1), inversions (4, 3, 2, 1) and (5, 3, 2, 1).
- F#7 = G♭7:** Root position (5, 3, 2, 1), inversions (4, 3, 2, 1) and (5, 3, 2, 1).
- G7:** Root position (4, 3, 2, 1), inversions (5, 3, 2, 1) and (5, 3, 2, 1).
- D7:** Root position (4, 3, 2, 1), inversions (5, 3, 2, 1) and (5, 3, 2, 1).
- A7:** Root position (4, 3, 2, 1), inversions (4, 3, 2, 1) and (4, 3, 2, 1).
- E7:** Root position (4, 3, 2, 1), inversions (5, 3, 2, 1) and (5, 3, 2, 1).
- B7:** Root position (4, 3, 2, 1), inversions (4, 3, 2, 1) and (4, 3, 2, 1).

Figure 40: Fingering for Inversions of Seventh Chords

Phrase Preparation

Phrase preparation means to position your hand and fingers properly to begin the next phrase. Just as one must consider how one note follows another in choosing fingering within a phrase, it is useful to make some of the same considerations for notes between phrases. By choosing a slightly different fingering or finger substitution at the end of one phrase, you may be able to start the next phrase more accurately.

Left Hand Fingering

Because the bass side of the accordion is not even remotely similar to a piano keyboard, and because identical pitches can be found at three or four buttons, many different fingering patterns have evolved for the bass. The method books mentioned earlier can be used for learning to play the bass. There are three additional books that should be considered for learning the bass: “Melodic Adventures in Bass-Land for the Accordion” by John Caruso [14], “Mastery of the Basses” by Norm Zeller [19] and “Bass Button Play-Day” by Alfred d’Auberge [15]. The latter book is, unfortunately, out of print.

Basic Technique

Even though the bass section uses buttons instead of black and white keys, some of the same basic techniques that apply to the right hand also apply to the left. Direct fingering certainly applies to the left hand. Finger slip, finger substitution and finger extension may also be applied to the left hand, although the techniques are used more rarely than in the case of the right hand.

Major Scales for the Bass

There are three common methods of playing a major scale on the basses. These are shown on the first three staves of Figure 41. “American” fingering is the most commonly taught in America. The main advantage of American fingering is that the weakest finger, the 5th, is not used at all. Galla-Rini [3] points out that there are certain awkward stretches in American Fingering. On staves 2 and 3 are two equally correct methods called “Continental” fingering. One of these begins on with the third finger, and the other begins on the fourth finger. Advanced players should learn both methods. Ralph Stricker [2] has noted that we need to be able to play the major scale beginning with the root on the counter-bass row as well as the normal bass row, and has given a possible fingering for that purpose, shown on the 4th staff of Figure 41. For my hands, I find his fingering very difficult. As an alternative, I suggest the “Counter-bass Only” method shown on the 5th staff. The “Counter-bass Only” fingering can also be applied to the bass row as well. Teachers may wish to note that this fingering can be used to show how the Greeks used two “Tetrachords” to generate the diatonic scale so commonly used in western music.

Major Scale Fingering for Bass

American Fingering

Continental Fingering (starting with 3rd finger)

Continental Fingering (starting with 4th)

Stricker Counterbass Root

Counterbass Only

Figure 41: Fingering for the Major Scales on the Basses

Minor Scales for the Bass

Fingering for the minor scales on the left hand is fairly difficult. For the harmonic minor I have found fingerings by Galla-Rini [3], Gaviani [17], Nunzio [4] and Zeller [19]. These fingerings are shown in Figure 42. On the Galla-Rini method, the alternate suggestion for using the 3rd finger instead of the 4th is mine, not Galla-Rini's. The problem with Gaviani's method is that a different finger is used on the starting note and ending note in the scale. The second fingering from Zeller is suggested for use when the hand is far down on the bass board, in the key of four or more flats. I have added an alternative fingering which combines some of the features of both the Galla-Rini and the Gaviani fingerings. I have supplemented that with a suggestion for fingering which starts on the counter-bass row.

Harmonic Minor for the Bass

Galla-Rini

Gaviani

Nunzio

Zeller (1)

Zeller (2)

Smith

Smith - Counterbass

Figure 42: Fingering for the Harmonic Minor Bass

Figure 43 shows fingerings for the melodic minor by Galla-Rini (a 1939 version and a 1981 version), Magnante and Nunzio. The 140 Bass version by Louis Chicca was shown to me by Mary Alice Elden. I have supplemented the fingerings with a version that begins on the counter-bass row. The fingering for the ascending scale was taken from Stricker.

Melodic Minor for the Bass

Galla-Rini (1981)

Galla-Rini (1939)

Magnante

Nunzio

Zeller

Chicca - 140 Bass

Counterbass

Figure 43: Fingering for the Melodic Minor Bass

Chromatic Scales for the Bass

According to Galla-Rini [3], the chromatic scale is the most difficult of all scales for the left hand. A number of fingerings for the chromatic scale are shown below in Figure 44. I have separated the various fingerings by the fingers used in the most difficult part. In the first group, fingers 2 and 4 have to stretch to reach some of the adjacent chromatic notes. Probably the oldest fingering is the one given by Pietro Deiro [12] for the “Ordinary Hand.” The advantage of this method is that it is the only one that avoids the use of the 5th finger. For the ascending scale, the method involves a finger slide from C# to D and also from F#

to G. This method has the disadvantage that a different fingering is required for the ascending and descending scales. On the descending scale, Deiro suggests using the same finger when playing both G and F#, making it impossible to play the scale *Legato*. Further, there appears to be no significant advantage for this fingering over his recommendation for the “Large Hand,” except for the absence of the 5th finger, as mentioned above. I do not know the author of the method shown as “unknown” on the 3rd staff, but it is the method that I was taught. Stricker’s fingering is shown on the 4th staff. I believe that it offers some advantage over the other 2-4 methods shown above it.

The 3-5 Stretch fingering was probably introduced by Galla-Rini, and adapted by Palmer Hughes. An interesting variation in which the scale begins with the 5th finger is taken from Gesualdo [20]. For my hands, I find the 3-5 Stretch fingering nearly impossible to play. I can make the reach, but I cannot do it reliably. The difficult part is the use of the 3rd and 5th fingers to play D and D#, and the sequence G and G#. If you can learn to make that stretch, this is a good method.

It appears to me that the 2-5 Stretch is easier than the others shown here. The fingering suggested by Charles Nunzio [4] for the ascending scale is an improvement over Deiro’s “Ordinary Hand,” but the descending scale has the same problem that Deiro’s has. According to Zev Zions, a student of Nunzio, for legato fingering Nunzio recommends using the 4th finger in the counter-bass position for the notes of D and G, the same as the Deiro “Large Hand” fingering. In my opinion, the version put forth by Charles Magnante [13] does offer a significant improvement for small hands than the Deiro or Nunzio method. I have added the option of using the 4th finger on the upper C. That is useful if the descending scale fingering is to continue beyond one octave. It also allows for the same fingering on multiple ascending scales. On the descending scale, Magnante’s method requires different fingering than for the ascending scale. On the last staff, I offer a suggestion that changes the Magnante method to a symmetrical one, allowing the same fingering on both the ascending and descending scales. I encourage the reader to try all of these fingerings and to choose the one that fits his or her hand the best. There are even more possibilities than those shown here, and you may wish to try to discover some other fingerings that may be better for you.

Fingering for Bass Chromatic Scale

2 - 4 Stretch:

Deiro, Ordinary Hand

Deiro, Large Hand

Unknown

Stricker

3 - 5 Stretch:

Galla-Rini

Gesualdo

2 - 5 Stretch:

Nunzio

Magnante

Smith, Symmetric

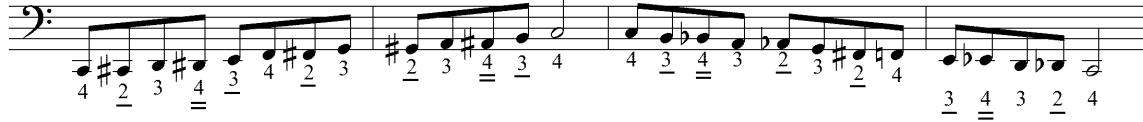
Figure 44: Fingering for the Bass Chromatic Scale

Some accordionists prefer the 140 bass accordion with the minor double counter-bass row. I have found a 140 bass fingering for the chromatic scale in an older book by Galla-Rini, and that fingering is shown below. For my hands, it is extremely difficult to play, giving no advantage over the 120 bass fingerings. I have come up with four other methods, shown in Figure 45. (They may or may

not be original.) Note that the double counter-bass is indicated by two underscore lines.

140 Bass Chromatic Scale Fingering

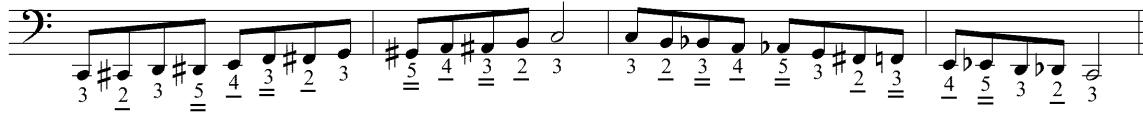
Galla-Rini:



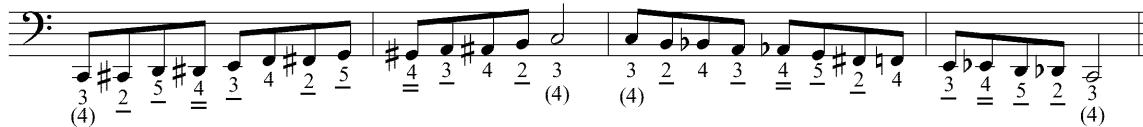
Method A:



Method B:



Method C:



Method D:

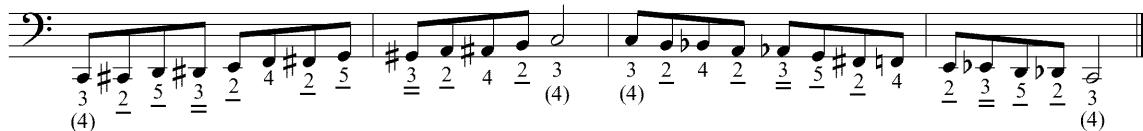


Figure 45: Fingerings for the chromatic scale on the 140 bass accordion

Legato Bass-Chord Combinations

Occasionally a bass and chord combination needs to be played in a legato manner, moving among the tonic, subdominant and dominant chords. Figure 46 gives an example from Galla-Rini.

Legato Bass-Chord Combination

Galla-Rini Fingering

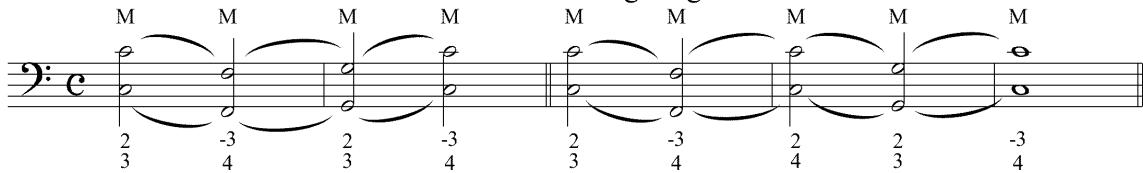


Figure 46: Legato bass-chord combination as suggested by Galla-Rini

One of the things to be noticed here is the use of the finger slip (on finger 3) from a bass button to the chord button of the next lower chord. However, the fingering shown is not completely satisfactory since some jumps have to be made which cannot be made truly legato (finger 3 moving from F chord to the G bass), or nearly impossible (finger 4 moving from F bass to C bass). For my hand, I find in the second example that moving the 2nd finger from the C chord to the G chord is possible to do in a legato manner, although it is not easy. I offer two alternatives to the above fingering. Two ideas are introduced in alternative #1. In the first example, the rarely used 5th finger is used to avoid the loss of legato moving from the F chord and bass to the G chord and bass. In the second example, finger extensions are used to play both bass and chord buttons with the same finger. If your fingers are small, it may be necessary to employ the flat part of the fingers to accomplish this.

Legato Bass-Chord Combination
Alternative Fingering #1

M M M M M M M M M
 2 3 5 4 2 3 5 4 3 3 4 4 3 3 2 2 3 3

Figure 47: First alternative fingering for legato bass-chord combination

In the second alternative, shown below, finger substitution is employed to allow smooth transitions between notes. Since the bass buttons are much smaller than the treble keys, some practice is required to make the finger substitutions.

Legato Bass-Chord Combination
Alternative Fingering #2

M M M M M M M M M
 2 3 3 4 2 2-3 3 4 2 3 3 4 2-3 4 2-3 4 2 2-3 3 4

Figure 48: Second alternative fingering for legato bass-chord combination

Bass-Chord Fingering

There has been a fair amount of debate about the fingering used in standard bass-chord fingering. The usual fingering in the United States is called “3-2”, where the third finger is used for the fundamental bass note and the second finger is used on the related major chord. In that case, the “alternating” bass note also uses the third finger. An alternate method, more common in Europe, is the “4-3” fingering, using the fourth finger on the fundamental bass note and the third finger on the chord. The “alternating” bass uses the second finger. For American users, an easily accessible method book that emphasizes the “4-3” fingering is “Melodic Adventures in Bass-Land” [14]. Probably the best discussion of the question of which fingering is best is by Galla-Rini [3]. Basically his conclusion is that both fingerings should be learned so that the most appropriate fingering can be used, depending on the context. Figure 49 shows some examples of fingering in which large jumps are made either upward or downward. As a general rule, one should probably use the 4-3 pattern when the next move is upward and the 3-2 pattern when the next move is downward. In some cases you may even use the same finger on both the bass and its chord in order to allow another finger to reach a substantial distance without leaping or jumping.

Up and Down the Basses

The musical notation consists of two staves, labeled A and B, on a bass clef staff. The staff has a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a time signature of common time (indicated by a 'C'). The notes are eighth notes. Fingerings are indicated below the notes:

- Staff A:** The first note is preceded by a box containing 'A'. The fingerings below the notes are: 4, 3, 2, 3, 4, 3, 2, 4, 3, 2, 3, 2, 3, 2, 3, 4. There are two 'M' markings above the staff, corresponding to the 3rd and 7th notes.
- Staff B:** The first note is preceded by a box containing 'B'. The fingerings below the notes are: 4, 4, 2, 2, 4, 3, 4, 2, 5, 5, 4, 5, 2, 2, 4, 3. There are four 'M' markings above the staff, corresponding to the 2nd, 4th, 6th, and 8th notes.

Figure 49: Bass-chord fingering for moving up and down the basses

The Diminished Chord Button

The diminished chord button can be somewhat confusing. When the indicated diminished chord button is played, a three-note chord is produced. The three notes could be considered as a diminished seventh chord with the (diminished) fifth omitted. But one could say that the chord is really a diminished triad whose root is the 6th of the notated chord. Thus depressing the C diminished chord button results in an A diminished triad.

Many basses and chords can be played simultaneously to produce different chords. Figure 50 shows some of the variations possible on the C diminished chord button, along with commonly used fingering. Three different methods are shown for obtaining a complete C-diminished seventh chord. Note that the C minor sixth chord is also called the A half diminished chord. Note also the alternate form of the F seventh chord where the F counter-bass is used. (F is the counter-bass of C-sharp). This looks difficult, but becomes fairly easy with practice. This combination is shown in Book 9 of the Palmer-Hughes book [5], and also by Ralph Stricker [2]. Palmer-Hughes notes that it is used rather commonly by professional accordionists. Further use of this form is discussed below.

Diminished Chord Variations

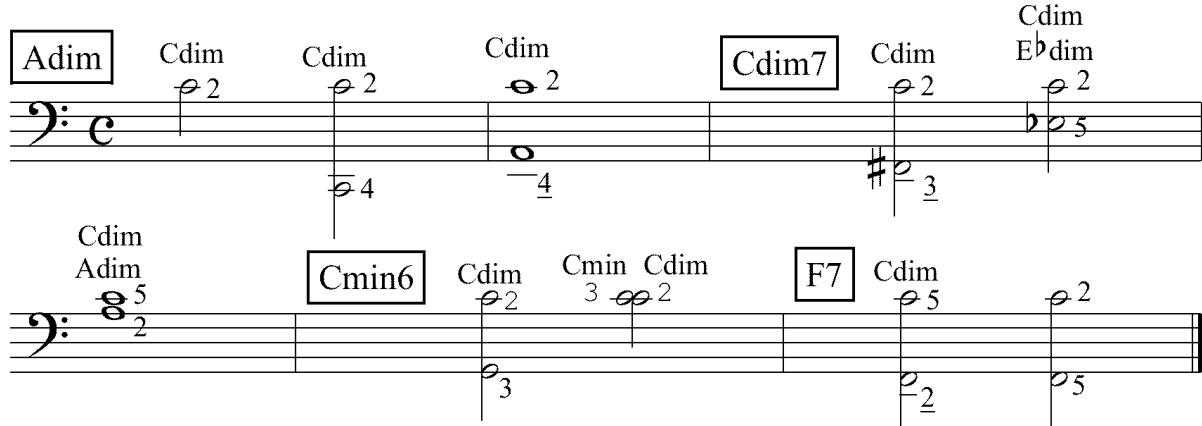


Figure 50: Variations on the Diminished Chord button

Some accordionists have learned to use their thumb when playing the diminished chord button. That at least gives some musical use of the left thumb. Figure 51 shows some of the possibilities.

Diminished Chords with Thumb

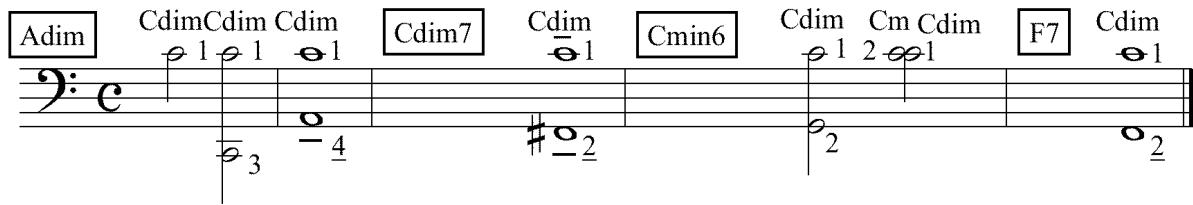


Figure 51: Using the Thumb on Diminished Chord Variations

Chromatic Sequences of the Seventh Chord

In the previous section I noted an unusual form of the seventh chord in which a counter-bass is used in conjunction with a diminished chord. If you are not familiar with this alternate chord, you may think that it is rather useless. The utility comes about by greatly reducing the distance that the left hand would otherwise move when the desired seventh chord is far away from the previous chord. For example, if you are playing a C-seventh chord and need to play a B seventh chord next, there is a substantial jump to the B. Unless you are an exceedingly good player you will probably miss the jump at least some of the time. The alternate form can be used instead. Figure 52 gives a few exercises where seventh chords are played in chromatic sequences.

Chromatic Seventh Chords for Bassses

Figure 52: Exercises for Seventh Chords in Chromatic Sequence

An Example

For a real example of fingering, I am including my transcription of an old favorite, **Nola**. Be careful to distinguish the numbers used for fingering from the italic 3's used to indicate triplets.

This arrangement is somewhat closer to the original piano arrangement than previous accordion arrangements. The major difficulty is that the piano arrangement covers a wider range of notes than can be readily reached on the accordion keyboard. Earlier I mentioned the technique of redistribution where the left hand continues a sequence from the right hand. An example of this can be seen in measure 18, where the descending sixth chord arpeggio in the right hand is continued onto the bass side. The bass fingering here is reasonably obvious.

The improved fingering for the “break” in Nola, mentioned earlier, is shown in measures 10 and 11, and repeated in measures 34 and 35. The important thing here is to start the descending run using the 5th finger.

In measures 50 to 52 there are two points to observe. First notice the use of the 5th finger under the 4th in the transition from measure 50 to 51. That is not absolutely necessary, but it does reduce a certain amount of difficulty that would otherwise result. Also notice the use of the finger slip of the thumb at the end of the descending run.

Measure 58 illustrates a technique of finger substitution during a rest! It is used here to pre-position the hand for the next note for greater accuracy.

Another example of finger slip of the thumb is shown in measure 71.

Finally, notice a finger substitution for the purposes of pre-positioning in measure 76. That makes it much easier to reach the next note, which is more than an octave higher.

Nola

A new transcription for Piano Accordion

Felix Arndt, 1915

arr: R. L. Smith

Lightly

0 ♯ Intro.

14

Bass-Piano

8

11

14

arr. R. L. Smith

Intro.

Musette 1 Bass-Piano

5

8

11

14

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17

20

23

26

29

32

35

38

41

to Coda

44

S₁

B.S.

m

M

M

48 1 5 3 2 1 5

Go to S₂
 + Violin Sw

51 5 4 3 2 1 2 5 5 1 5 4
 3 3 1 3 3 1 3 1 2 1 2 1 2 1 4
 7 B.S. m 7 2 3

55 3 1 4 3 2 4 3 3 3 5 3 4 5
 4 M 7 M M B.S. 2 3 2 4

58 4 5 4 3 2 1 2-3 2 1 3 2 1 3 3 Go to S₂
 + Violin Sw

62 1 2 5 2 1 3 2 5 1 2 3 1 2 1 2 1 2 7
 m

65

7 M

12432 1213235 124125
124#124#124#

68

#124#123 512412 323 423
M dim M dim M dim
5

70

M
15 1-15 13
poco rit. Go to §1

72 Coda

7 M 7 M
5 3 14

74

7 M 7 M dim M dim M
424 524 3-1

77

535421 524 413 7
dim M dim M dim
7 M

Concluding Remarks

I encourage the reader to try to experiment to discover the best fingering for his or her own hands. If you have relatively thin fingers, you may be able to put your fingers on white keys between black keys, which can lead to more possibilities for some of the examples shown herein. If you have thick fingers, you may find it convenient to use one finger on two adjacent bass buttons (when appropriate). Try to keep your mind open to all possibilities. Using a thumb on a black key may be the best solution for a particular fingering problem. A thumb glide or a finger slip may solve a problem. When you think you have worked out a good fingering, mark up your music in pencil, not ink.

Acknowledgements

I acknowledge contributions to this work from Ephra Baer, Steve Cannata, Lone Coleman, Henry Doktorski, Telmo Echeverri, Mary Alice Elden, Lynn Ewing, Sev Garcia, Helmi Harrington, Don Komorski, Valarie Morris, Reno Pucci, Joseph Smiell, Sharon Walters and Zev Zions.

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