

A close-up photograph of a 5-string banjo neck. The fretboard is dark wood with metal frets. Two white, diamond-shaped inlays are visible on the fretboard. The strings are silver and run across the neck. The background is a vibrant, multi-colored striped fabric in shades of red, orange, yellow, green, and blue. The text is overlaid on the image.

Patterns

On your  
5-String  
Banjo

Unlock the secrets of  
Blues Improvisation  
By Jennie Williams

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## Introduction

Two and a half years ago I started to create my first Blues solos and I made 2 Blues Fiddle teaching videos and put them up on YouTube. To my surprise they were very successful and I had a lot of requests to make more videos. I had taught one pentatonic minor scale and how to improvise using this and short of making videos in every key I couldn't think how to help people further.

At the same time I was becoming interested in playing Blues on my 5-string banjo and decided I would try to work out the patterns for all the different scales so I could happily play Blues in any key. As I was doing this, I was struck by the interesting pattern shapes that the scales were creating. They suggested names to me like 'one bar gate', 'crown' and 'wonky m' so I ran with this idea and found that by using these names I could more easily remember the shapes I needed to play . . .and so the 2<sup>nd</sup> part of this book was born. Somehow, though, I knew it wasn't complete as there was the question of chords and how these could fit into my improvisation. I took the same approach as with the scales looking at the shapes and again became fascinated by the patterns – how they shift and change as they move up the neck. . .and so Part 3 was born.

Music – it's all about patterns and shapes! I wish someone had told me this 35 years ago! I thought that it was only something that the intellectual and the left brained could understand! The more I worked to understand the patterns on my banjo the more I wanted to understand the bigger patterns of music – scales, chords and keys – and so the first part of this book was born.

Now my intention is to write the patterns for the Blues scales on my other instruments – fiddle, guitar and ukulele. I am intrigued as to what my discoveries will be! Please look out for my next books!

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# The Secrets of Chords

Chords are groups of notes played together. They are usually based on three notes – the root, third and fifth of any major or minor scale. A major third creates a major chord and a minor third creates a minor chord. The interval of the major or minor 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> can also be found in simple chords but when the 6<sup>th</sup> is played the fifth is left out. Sometimes the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> is used to replace the third. This chord is called suspended – it has a clashing unsettled sound and will usually be followed by the basic root, third and fifth chord to resolve it. The intervals of the 9<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> can be added to chords – these are the same as 2<sup>nd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> but an octave higher.

To construct the more commonly used chords please see sheet 1 of 'Build Your Own Chords'. Sheet 2 explains the construction of more unusual chords. You may occasionally come across symbols for these chords in the music you are playing and it's nice to know what they mean. It doesn't mean you have to play them! – the chances are a more basic construction of the chord might fit just as well. Enjoy trying chords out and remember that the most important thing is to create the sound you like.

Although chords are based on 3 notes (4 when you play the 7<sup>th</sup> chords) you can play as many notes as there are strings on your instrument. The extra notes however will be duplicates but possibly at a different octave.

Depending on what note is at the bottom of the chord, chords have different positions. A chord that has the root at the bottom is described as being in 'root position.' The intervals in this chord are all thirds and it sounds pleasing to the ear and as if it has a solid foundation. A chord that has the 3<sup>rd</sup> at the bottom (major or minor) is described as being a 'first inversion' chord. This has a slightly less satisfying ring than a root position chord as the true base note is missing and the intervals are a third and a fourth. A chord that has the 5<sup>th</sup> at the bottom is described as being a 'second inversion' chord. This sounds even less satisfying to the ear as now we're a long way from the true base of the chord and the intervals will be 3rds and 4ths. Sometimes you may find a chord without a 3<sup>rd</sup> creating the intervals of 4<sup>th</sup> and 5ths. The interval of the fifth has a bit of an empty ring. The chord sounds more satisfying when the third is present.

# 5-STRING BANJO

## MAJOR PENTATONIC SCALE SHAPES FOR EVERY SCALE

(A, Bb and B MAJOR)

A MAJOR

Using patterns 'box' and 'crown'. You could also use the patterns 'double v', 'wonky m' and 'up the banjo'.

Bb MAJOR

Using patterns 'box' and 'crown'. You could also use the patterns 'double v', 'wonky m' and 'up the banjo'.

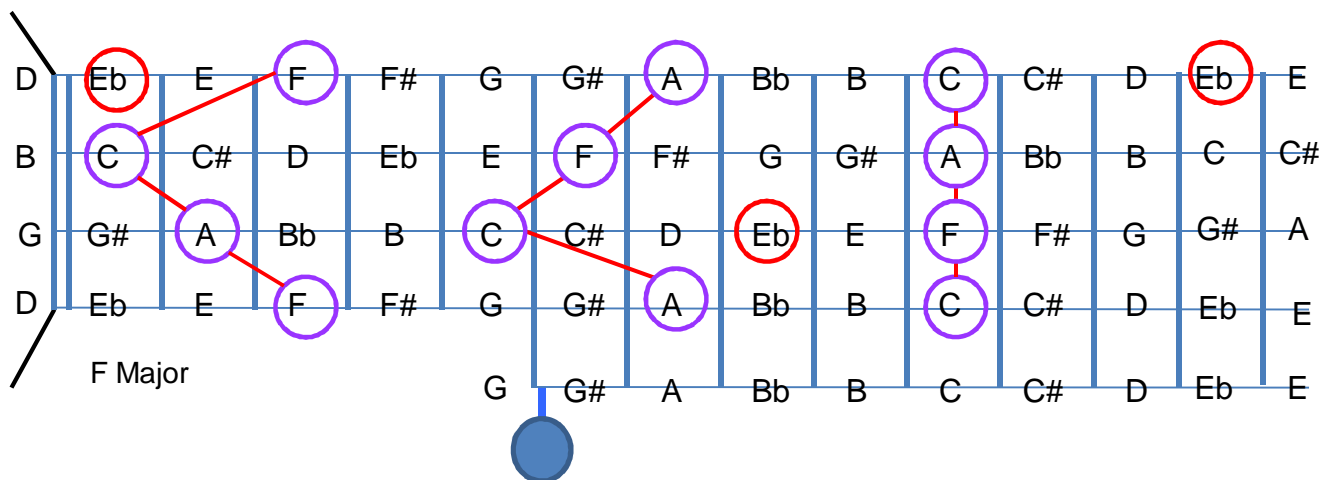
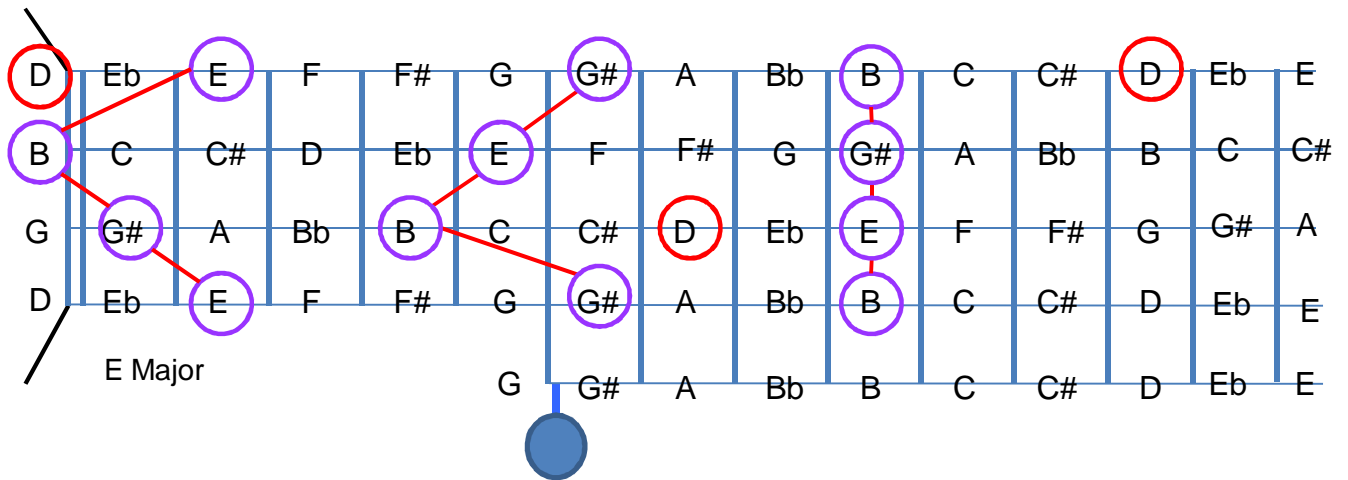
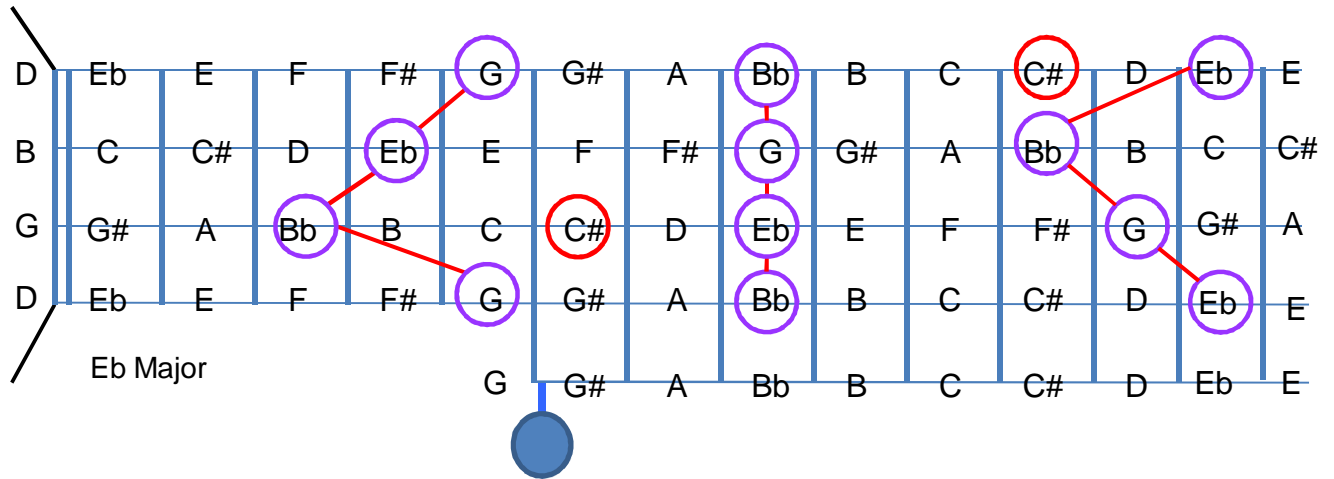
B MAJOR

Using patterns 'box' and 'crown'. You could also use the patterns 'double v', 'wonky m' and 'up the banjo'.

# 5-STRING BANJO

## MAJOR CHORD SHAPES FOR EVERY SCALE

(Eb, E and F MAJOR)



## Conclusion:

### Moving Beyond the Patterns

In the pages of this book I hope to have given you a framework that you can use to create your Blues solos but there is more . . .

When I improvise I play what I hear in my head. I don't know whether I'm going to find the exact notes with my fingers but I quite often do! This is probably partly down to practice and experience but also a result of being very intuitive.

I don't think about notes, scales, chords or keys but simply play the notes that my fingers find. That may sound strange as I am a classically trained musician but something tells me that this is the way I have to play.

Coming back to the purpose for this book, it is a framework and if I put a backing track on and feel stuck and unable to find the notes and chords I hear, I use my book. I can find the scale patterns and chord shapes that match the key and these give me a stable base from which to create my solo. The next time I come to improvise in that key I may not need to look at the written patterns and shapes as my fingers will remember them.

My aim in music is to make every note count and allow every note to come from within. I hope that this can become your aim too and that you will allow yourself to move beyond the patterns and fly with your own Blues voice.

Happy Flying,

Jennie

