

The Basic Principles of the Air Tuned Karimba

You can download the MP3 files for these songs at:

www.kalimbamagic.com/downloads/airkarimba77

What makes the Air-tuned Karimba? It is a Hugh Tracey African-tuned Karimba, but the tuning has been modified to SaReGaMa's Air tuning. You can purchase an Air-tuned karimba online from Kalimba Magic, or you could take your karimba apart and rearrange and retune it as shown at the foot of the tablature.

Every tine on the Air-Tuned Karimba *except for three exceptional tines* follow a simple and uniform rule to navigate the scale - you alternate back and forth, right to left to right, going incrementally outward on the lower row tines and then incrementally in toward the center on the upper row tines to move up the scale, and the inverse pattern to go down the scale.

The first two patterns to the right illustrate portions of the scale on the lower row, and then the upper row tines. The third longer pattern shows the entire scale.

What scale? It is a D minor scale, and we get almost to the top D of a second octave of this D minor scale, but only get up to C.

By the way - what is all the fuss about keys? A lot of people don't understand "keys", and that is just fine. What you need to know about key and this kalimba is that it likes to play in D - that is, the D note likes to be the most important one. It sounds great when you start or end a phrase on a D. Furthermore, this kalimba is in D minor. "Minor" is just the flavor you get when you play this scale.

Note which notes we did not play - the low G and A, and the seemingly out-of-place high D in the middle of the kalimba.

4/4

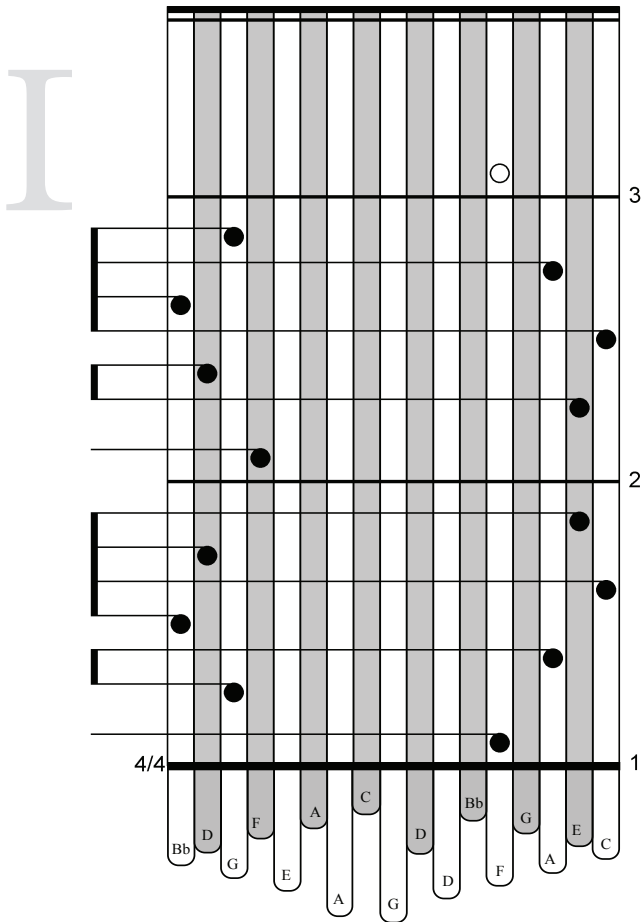
Bb D G F A C D Bb G A E C

MP3 01

MP3 02

Actually, you can play a major scale on the Air Karimba - it turns out to be an F major. However, most of the time you play this instrument, you will probably not be playing in F major, but in D minor. D minor is a more “natural” key for this kalimba for a few reasons that we’ll get to.

Usually, when you pick up a kalimba, the most important note is the lowest note. It is a psychological advantage for the lowest note on the kalimba to be the key, and often it is. You will spend a lot of your time on *this instrument* avoiding the lowest note, or G. In the key of D, G is a “helping note”, but it is not even the most important helping note. A is the 5th of G, and as such is the most important helping note to D.

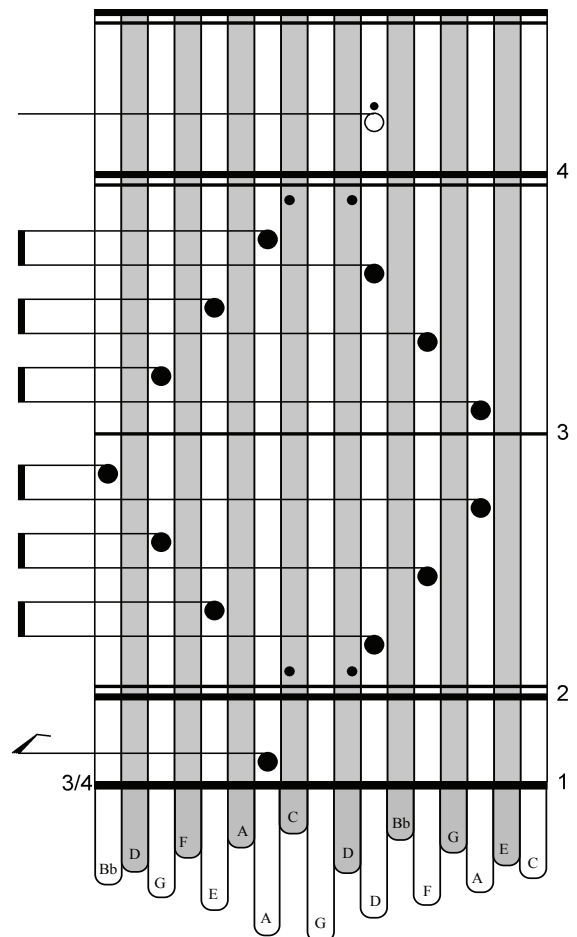


(How did I get that A is the 5th of D? I counted up: D is 1, E is 2, F is 3, G is 4, and there is no note named “H”, the next note is A, which is the 5th of D. It is a bit more complicated than that, as we have ignored the possibility of flats and sharps, but just counting up the scale is the basic truth.)

The music to the right illustrates just how A is a helping note for D. It starts with D - A and ends with D - A. It sounds good and feels strong. Its great! In fact, it is the heart of most western classical and popular music.

The double horizontal lines with the two dots above or below are *repeat signs*. Repeat the music between those signs as many times as you like. To get off, jump from the final A of measure 3 into the D of measure 4.

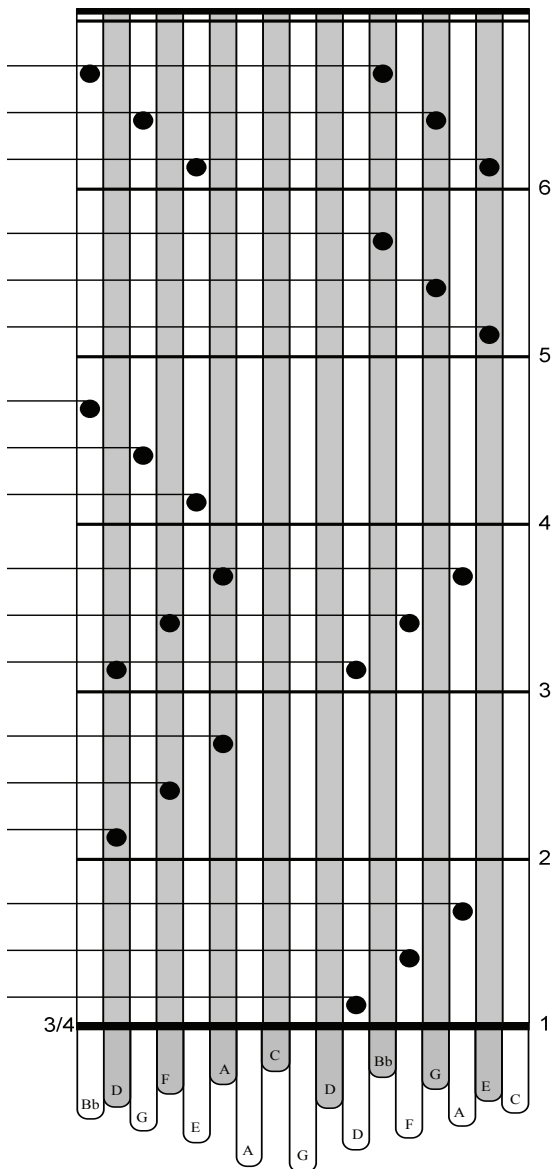
MP3 03



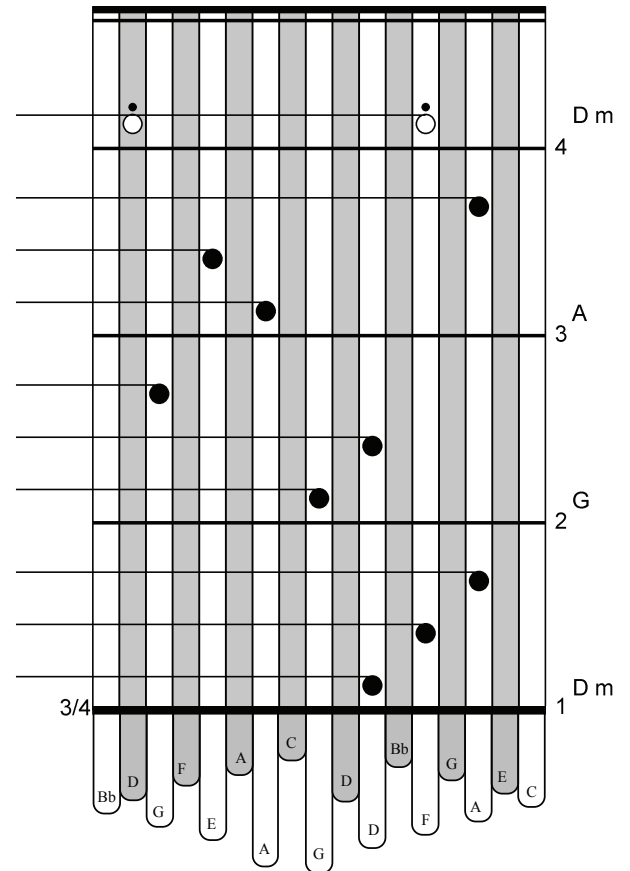
The music to the right introduces the low G note for the first time. This music traces out the notes in three chords, D minor (Dm), G, and A. The song comes back to the Dm at the end. The first note in each measure is the “root” of the chord of each measure. What is the “root” of a chord? It is the note that is the “1” of the chord, or the note that the chord is named after. The root of a B 7 chord is B. The root of a G minor chord is G. While there is no rule that you need to start each measure with the root of its chord (there are many measures of playing that don’t really have a chord), when you do it your playing will sound clear and decisive.

The music to the right makes a classic musical statement: we start at home on the Dm chord, then go to the G, or IV (four) chord, then to A or V (five) chord, and back to Dm - the root, or i. Why is it i and not the I (one) chord? Because it is minor, it is represented by a lower case Roman numeral.

MP3 05



MP3 04



A very important result of the way the tines are arranged on the Air Karimba is seen in the arrangement of notes that make octave pairs. The low D - F - A on the right side (measure 1) are mirrored by higher D - F - A on the left side (measure 2), and they can be played together (measure 3). Similarly, the low notes E - G - Bb on the left side (measure 4) are mirrored by higher E - G - Bb on the right side (measure 5), and they too can be played together (measure 6).

MP3 06

DRAFT

3/4

1 2 3 4 5 6

Bb D G F E A C D Bb G A E C

The music to the left is almost like the music on the previous page, pairing the lower D F A notes with the upper D F A notes, but the lower notes go up while the higher notes go down. They work together in any order because the notes D F and A make the D minor chord. You can play any two of those notes at the same time and they will sound good.

MP3 07

T=160

6/8

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

Bb D G F A C D Bb G A E C

G E A G D F A F A F A

One of the oddball notes is the extra high D in the middle of the kalimba. This tine is usually played by the right thumb, and this note is doubled on the far upper left tine - which means that you can play them in a trill. That is, you can play that note, alternating left to right or right to left, twice as fast as other notes on the instrument.

Just trilling a note is not very interesting, but fortunately there are a lot of interesting ways you can work the trill in to karimba music.

DRAFT

MP3 08

A diagram of a 17-key Karimba fretboard. The fretboard is oriented vertically with the bridge at the bottom. The keys are numbered 1 to 5 from bottom to top. The diagram shows a sequence of notes and trills across five measures. The notes are: Measure 1: Bb, D, G, F, E, A, C, G, D, Bb, F, A, E, C. Measure 2: D, Bb, F, A, C, G, D, Bb, F, A, E, C. Measure 3: G, F, E, A, C, G, D, Bb, F, A, E, C. Measure 4: A, C, G, D, Bb, F, A, E, C. Measure 5: C, G, D, Bb, F, A, E, C. Trills are indicated by a vertical line with a dot at the top, connecting two adjacent notes in the same measure. The trills are: (D, E) in measure 1, (A, B) in measure 2, (C, D) in measure 3, (G, A) in measure 4, and (D, E) in measure 5. The time signature is 6/8 and the tempo is T=120.

More trill-based music.

MP3 09

3/4

Bb D G F E A C D Bb G E C

I did this song with one of my students - it makes a good foundation for more complex accompaniment on the high notes on the opposite side as the bass notes shown here.

One - Four - Five - this song is made up of four different repeated 8-measure sections each with different styles: section 1 marks out the chordal arpeggios, section 2 shows the octave of the root note of each chord, section 3 is an understated romantic theme, and section 4 begins to explore the high notes.

3/4

9

8

7

6

5

4

3

2

1

Bb D F A C D Bb G E C

16

15

14

13

12

11

10

9

Bb D F A C D Bb G E C

A diagram of a 17-string karimba fretboard for measures 17 through 25. The strings are numbered 17 at the bottom to 25 at the top. The fretboard is divided into vertical columns representing fret positions. Black dots indicate fingerings for each string. Measure numbers 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, and 25 are marked on the right side. At the bottom, the strings are labeled with notes: Bb, D, G, F, E, A, C, D, Bb, G, A, E, C.

A diagram of a 17-string karimba fretboard for measures 25 through 32. The strings are numbered 25 at the bottom to 32 at the top. The fretboard is divided into vertical columns representing fret positions. Black dots indicate fingerings for each string. Measure numbers 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, and 32 are marked on the right side. At the bottom, the strings are labeled with notes: Bb, D, G, F, E, A, C, D, Bb, G, A, E, C.

MP3 11

Here is another cool thing you can do with that spare high D sitting in the middle of the kalimba - this makes a musical figure that J.S. Bach was fond of. In the first measure, we make a uniform geometrical pattern, starting on the spare D, and it simply makes that Bach figure. Of course, if you want to repeat that figure shifted down a step or two, it is no longer simple! In measure 3, you need to jump from the right C to the right Bb - two right thumb notes in a row, which is possible, but not quite so easy. Measure 5 continues the pattern, but on the left.

Figure out how fast you can make the same side jumps, and try to play the piece just a bit slower than that tempo.

Here is something new: the last two notes in measure 7 are both on the right side, and are adjacent to each other (neglecting the shorter note in between) - which means that you can slide from the A to the C - also called a *glissando*, which will make it much easier to play two notes on the same side in quick succession.

DRAFT

MP3 12

A detailed diagram of a 17-key kalimba fretboard. The fretboard is oriented vertically with the bridge at the bottom. The keys are numbered 1 through 8 from bottom to top. The diagram shows the fretting patterns for each key across the fretboard. The fretboard is divided into four sections by horizontal lines. The first section (keys 1-4) has a 4/4 time signature. The second section (keys 5-8) has a 4/4 time signature. The third section (keys 9-12) has a 4/4 time signature. The fourth section (keys 13-16) has a 4/4 time signature. The diagram includes a large 'DRAFT' watermark in the background. The fretboard is labeled with notes: Bb, D, G, F, E, A, C, D, Bb, G, E, C. The fretboard is numbered 1 through 8 from bottom to top. The fretboard is divided into four sections by horizontal lines. The first section (keys 1-4) has a 4/4 time signature. The second section (keys 5-8) has a 4/4 time signature. The third section (keys 9-12) has a 4/4 time signature. The fourth section (keys 13-16) has a 4/4 time signature.

Chords!

Two techniques:
Glissando;
Right thumb + index finger

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