

The Chord Of Death

This exercise is both demanding and exhausting. I don't recommended it for anyone easily frustrated. I no longer can do it well, but I think the attempt may be helping me reverse hand stiffness from my arthritis.

I originally devised it as a chord exercise for students interested in going from folk playing which is mostly open triad chords, into a jazz-ier style with closed chords, 9ths 11ths, suspended 4ths, etc. The idea was to train the hand to move only those fingers that needed to move when making a change.

	I M A P	M I A P	I A M P	I M P A	A M I P	I P A M	P M A I	M I A P
I	6	7 6	6 6	6 6	8 6	6 6	9 6	7 6
M	7	6 7	8 7	7 7	7 7	9 7	7 7	6 7
A	8	8 8	7 8	9 8	6 8	8 8	8 8	8 8
P	9	9 9	9 9	8 9	9 9	7 9	6 9	9 9

REPEAT

You can strum this exercise using 4 eighth notes per chord. As you gain proficiency, cut it to 2 eighths and eventually, one stroke per chord --- don't expect to be doing that too soon, however.

A Non Exercise-y Exercise

A lot of banjo tunes can be played without using the pinky at all. If you only need three fingers to play a tune, how about trying it without your index finger instead? Take something simple that you know well and substitute M,A,P for I,M,A. You won't be able to play it as well, but I'm not asking you to make your Opry debut with your index finger tied behind your back.

Note - when playing at the Opry you pronounce the "t" in dee-but.