

## Steve Carter's Mental Calisthenics

In jazz, sometimes it's more important to be able to think fast than to be able to play fast. You have to know the fundamentals of music so well, that they are second nature. At first you have to think about them, but after thinking about them enough, the thought process becomes instantaneous.

Here are some exercises that will help you think faster in music.

### CYCLE 5

Cycle 5 refers to a root progression down a perfect fifth (or up a perfect fourth). The cycle of fifths (a.k.a. cycle of fourths and fifths, cycle of fourths, circle of fifths, cycle five, etc.) is often written in a circle because starting at any point will eventually bring you back to the same point. I prefer to think of it as an endless straight line:

... C F Bb Eb Ab Db Gb B E A D G C...

You need to memorize this so that you can recite it as fast as you can spell your own name. One trick that helps with this is to notice that the word BEAD occurs in there. BEAD is followed by G, which I remember as part of BEAD GAME. Notice also that starting with Bb, the key names also spell BEAD Game. So you can just remember: C then F then BEAD GAME twice (once with flats, once without).

Practice reciting Cycle 5 first starting from C and ending on C, then starting on F and ending on F, and so forth, until you can recite it, starting on any note, in whole notes at MM=60. Keep at it until you can do this in eighth notes at MM=120.

Since many chords have their roots on the fifth and sixth strings, it is important to be able to find any note on these strings. Cycle 5 can help you with that. **You can do this away from the guitar by just visualizing the neck.** (This may be difficult at first, but the more you do it the easier it becomes.)

Think of the open E string. The next note in Cycle 5 is A; it is five frets higher on the neck. The next note is D, again five frets higher on the neck (not counting the one you are in). The next note is G, which would be five frets higher again, but that would put you in the 15th fret, which is too high to play a root 6 chord, so move down to the third fret. The next note is C, five frets higher. Next is F (either five frets higher, in fret 13, or fret 1). Continue: Bb (fret 6), Eb (fret 11), Ab (fret four), Db (fret 9), Gb (fret 2), B (fret 7). Next is E, which is where we began.

Repeat this whole process on the fifth string, starting with the open note, A.

A good way to become familiar with a new chord is to "run it through the cycle of fifths." As an advanced mental calisthenic, try to do this with, say, a major 7th chord, root six, visualizing and naming not just the root of each chord, but *every note!* (CAUTION: do not perform these exercises while driving, operating heavy equipment, or crossing city streets.)

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