

# The Major Pentatonic Modes

Csus2		A7sus4
Cadd2		Asus4
Cadd6	Dsus2	Gsus2
C	Dsus4	Gsus4
		A-7
		A-

Interval pattern: 2 2 3 2 3

Fig. 1. The C major pentatonic scale.

Scale degrees: 1\* 2 3 4 5

\* - tone center

Fig. 2. The five modes of C major pentatonic.

The **major pentatonic scale** may be viewed as a **subset** of the major scale. Fig. 1 shows the collection built on C. Note that it contains the first, second, third, fifth and sixth scale degrees of a C major scale. Although this scale has much in common with the major scale, it does not have the same dynamic qualities. Its ability to achieve directed linear motion is limited because the  $\hat{7}-\hat{1}$  and  $\hat{4}-\hat{3}$  tendency tones, as well as the tritone between  $\hat{4}$  and  $\hat{7}$ , are missing.

Like the major scale, the major pentatonic scale has an asymmetric interval pattern that produces 12 distinct collections under transposition ( $T_n$ ). Its 5 modes are shown in Fig. 2. The two most common modes are Modes 1 and 5. Jazz musicians refer to Mode 1 as the major pentatonic scale, and to Mode 5 as the **minor pentatonic scale**.

The major pentatonic scale may also be derived from a just tuning of 4 consecutive P5s, for example:

$$C-G-D-A-E$$

Fig. 3. Derivation of the major pentatonic scale from P5s.

This may help to explain its use in folk music across the globe. Finally, it should be mentioned that a major pentatonic scale built on F# (F#-G#-A#-C#-D#), and its enharmonic equivalent Gb (Gb-Ab-Bb-Db-Eb), corresponds with the black-keys of the piano. This scale is often referred to as the **black-key pentatonic scale**.

The term pentatonic scale actually refers to any 5-note scale. Some other important pentatonic scales are listed the *Scale Glossary* (see Appendix: *Scale Glossary*).