

Major and Minor Chords

Root position

Common chords are made up of three notes – from the bottom of a chord, each note is a third away from the next. We call these parts of the chord the root, third and fifth. The C major chord uses the notes C E G. C is the root of the chord. E is the third of the chord and G is the fifth of the chord. In major chords, the third is a major third from the root. The C minor chord uses the notes C Eb and G. In minor chords the third is a minor third from the root.

On the cello we can't play chords with the third in its regular position (sometimes called closed position because the notes are as close to each other as they can be). Instead, we put the third up an octave. So we play the chord with root on the bottom, then fifth, then third (now actually a "tenth").

Here are the major chords on the cello in root position. That means the name (or letter) of the chord is the lowest note. Notice that except for the C and the G chords, all of the chords in this position are played with the fingers placed 1 1 3 across the fingerboard.

Important! When you place your first finger across the bottom two strings like a guitar capo, make sure to allow your left elbow to drop. Let your left thumb straighten in a parallel line with your first finger. When you stop playing chords, bring your elbow back up and your thumb back to its original curved position under the fingerboard. Make sure to rest your hand frequently when you start chording!

Major Chords

Play pizzicato guitar style: right thumb on the bottom string, index finger on the middle string and middle finger on the top string. Pluck the strings at the same time with your thumb going towards the two fingers and your index and middle finger closing into the palm.

The image shows two rows of musical notation for major chords on the cello in root position. The first row contains chords C, D \flat , D, E \flat , E, F, F \sharp , and G. The second row contains chords A \flat , A, B \flat , B, and C. Each chord is shown on a bass clef staff with fingerings (0, 1, 2, 3) and accidentals (sharps and flats) indicated. The notes are arranged in root position: root, fifth, and third (tenth).

Minor Chords

Here are the minor chords on the cello in root position. Notice that except for the C and G minor chords, all of the chords in this position are played with the fingers placed 1 1 2 across the fingerboard.

The image shows two rows of musical notation for minor chords on the cello in root position. The first row contains chords C m , C $\sharp m$, D m , D $\sharp m$, E m , F m , F $\sharp m$, and G m . The second row contains chords G $\sharp m$, A m , B $\flat m$, B m , and C m . Each chord is shown on a bass clef staff with fingerings (0, 1, 2) and accidentals (sharps and flats) indicated. The notes are arranged in root position: root, fifth, and third (tenth).

From "A Rag, A Stomp and a Reel, Sequentially Arranged American Fiddle Tunes," pub. Mel Bay

Shove the Pig's Foot a Little Further into the Fire*

Key of G Major

Appalachian breakdown

In first position. Uses A, D and G strings. Fast string crossings and very syncopated with slurs and double stops.

The musical score is presented in two systems, each with a 'Tune' staff and an 'Accomp.' staff. The key signature is G major (one sharp) and the time signature is 2/4. The score is divided into four measures per system. Measure 1 of the first system is marked with a box 'A'. Measure 5 of the first system is marked with a '5' and a box 'B'. Measure 10 of the second system is marked with a '10' and a box 'B'. Measure 14 of the second system is marked with a '14'. Chord symbols G, C, D, and DG are placed above the staff. The 'Tune' staff contains a complex melodic line with many slurs and accents. The 'Accomp.' staff contains a bass line with double stops and slurs. There are two first endings and two second endings, each marked with a '1' and '2' above the staff.

* A "Pig's Foot" is a blacksmith's tool.

Use speed accents for the accents above.

Syncopated and On-the Beat Rhythmic Patterns

Jenny Dang the Weaver A section (key of D major)

Scottish Reel

A

5

B

13

A Full chord, root position. Syncopated rhythmic pattern (Charleston).

pizz/strum

1

B Full Chord, Root Position

pizz.

second time:

A Upper two-string voicing. Syncopated rhythmic pattern.

arco

B Upper 2 Strings, no Bass

arco

Off To California

Irish Traditional hornpipe

Swing! ♩ = ♩³♩

Chords: G C G 4 C G Em A A D

5 G C G 4 C G Em 4 ¹D G ²D G

10 Em Em Em A A D

14 G C G 4 C G Em 4 D G

Easy 2 voice Chords

18 G C Em or Em A or A D

Harder full chords

21 G C Em A D

Swing Rhythms

24 G on-the-beat G on-the-beat G jig-type G syncopated

Sweet Georgia Brown 1925

By Maceo Pinkard (1897-1962), Lyrics by Kenneth Casey and Ben Bernie

D7

1 2 3 4

No gal made has got a shade on sweet Geor - gia Brown. —
It's been said she knocks 'em dead when she lands in town. —

5 G7 to Coda ⊕

5 6 7 8

Dan - cing feet and why oh so neat — that sweet Geor - gia Brown. —
Since she came why it's a shame how she cools 'em down. —

9 C7

9 10 11 12

They all sigh and want to die — for sweet Geor - gia Brown — I'll tell — you just

13 F F A7 D.C. al Coda ⊕

13 14 15 16

Coda ⊕

17 Dm A7 Dm A7

17 18 19 20

F7 E7 Eb7 D7 G7 C7 F

21 22 23 24

Geor - gia named her, Geor - gia claimed her, sweet Geor - gia Brown. —

Cello Accompaniment Chords. Use where written.

25 D7 G7 C7 F A7 Dm

25 26 27 28 29 30

Ending Measures

31 F7 E7 Eb7 D7 G7 C7 F

31 32 33 34 35 36

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ASTA National Conference, 2021

Cello Chords and Rhythms for Accompaniment of Jazz, Rock and Fiddle Tunes

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Bibliography of Cello Chord Books:

Renata Bratt, "Cello Chords, Rhythms and Backups for Fiddle Tunes," pub. Mel Bay

Benjamin Whitcomb, "Compendium of Chords for the Cello," a classical guide to cello chords. www.benjaminwhitcomb.com

Bryan Wilson, "Cello Chords," a reference book of all types of chords available on the cello. www.bryanwilsoncello.com

Other String Books of Interest:

Darol Anger, Rushad Eggleston and Casey Driessen, "Chops and Grooves," video and booklet for violinists and cellists. Available from Homespun.com

Tracy Silverman, "The Strum Bowing Method: How to Groove on Strings." Pub. Silverman Musical Enterprises L.L.C (available everywhere online)