

## Barre Chords – A Practical Ukulele Bedford Guide

We will be looking at this from a practical point of view - only musical theory you will need is the scale. Here is the musical scale:

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

Do you have to learn a load of new chord shapes? No – you know many of them already!

### What are barre (bar) chords?

For our purposes, they are movable chords in which all 4 strings are fingered.

### Why use them?

Gives you a library of chords that you know, without having to memorize millions of chord shapes.

Use different variants of the same chord to give a different sound.

Make some chord changes easier.

Allow chunking – which means you can play funk/disco ukulele!

Transpose tunes easily (ish)

### How do they work?

Let's take an example. Play the chord of A (2100). You would normally use your index finger to fret the '1' and your middle finger to play the '2' in that shape. Instead, use your middle finger to play the '1' and your ring finger to play the '2'. Your index finger is now spare. Lay it down flat and it will cover all four strings behind the nut. Keeping your fingers in that shape move your hand up two frets. The shape should now be 4322, with your index finger flat on the fret board. That will be holding down the two '2' strings. Play all of the strings slowly, making sure they all sound clearly. If they don't (it will probably be the ones played with your index finger) adjust your fingers until they do. You may have to press down harder with your index finger (or press harder with your thumb on the back of the neck), or make sure you are pressing down the strings behind, not on, the fret.

When that is all sounding nice, play the chord. You have just played the chord of B! How? Well look at the scale at the top of the page. We started out playing an A chord and moved it up two frets. Two up from A on the scale is B. If we had only moved the same shape up one fret (3211) we would have been playing the chord A# (also called Bb). If we had moved it up three frets (5433) we would have been playing C (just refer to the scale). So just by moving the A shape up the neck we can play every major chord.

You can do the same with A minor (2000) and A7 (0100). Just change the finger you would normally use to fret the chord so your index finger is free, then use that as a 'movable nut' in exactly the same way you have just done for the A shape.

Another useful base chord to try this with is the F shape (2010). Follow the same procedure. Change fretting fingers, lay your index finger down, move the shape up the neck. Try moving

it up two frets to 4232. Look at the C, E and A strings. Does that shape look familiar? Yes – it's the G shape we always play! And moving the F shape up two steps on the scale gives us ta-da... a G! So you can see that this is just another way to think about chords – as related shapes rather than as individual ones.

There are loads of simple shapes you can use to do the same thing.

For example:

A Am A7 Am7 Amaj7 A7sus4 A9

C C7 Cmaj7 C9 Cm Cm6 C7sus4

Dm Dm7

Edim

F Fadd9 F9

Attached is a comprehensive first position chord chart. Pick some of those noted above, make a barre chord out of them (change fretting fingers, use index finger as a barre) and try them out!

### **Why Bother?**

Of course you may be asking 'why bother'?! You know C already and it's easy. Why would you want to play it as a barre chord at the third fret using the A shape? Or at the 7<sup>th</sup> fret using the movable F shape we have mentioned?

Here are some reasons.

They sound different. They are the same chord but have a different feel. Let's say you have a musical phrase that ends with a C chord. You can play your normal C (0003) and that would be musically correct. Or you could play one of the two variants using the A or F shapes, and you get a much brighter sound.

Sometimes, chord changes are easier. Let's say you have to play a little run of chords, one beat on each of G, G#, A. Firstly, who can play a G# chord at speed off the top of their heads?! Secondly, changing between them so quickly would be very awkward. So, just play G at the second fret using the F shape above, slide the whole thing up one fret for the G# and another for the A. Simple.

Play Dmaj7. Now. Blimey – umm. Or remember that Cmaj7 is 0002 and then slide it up two frets. Hey, you know EVERY SINGLE Major7 chord if you can remember that single Cmaj7 chord and the order the notes go in the scale at the beginning of this document! Now look back at that list of chords half a page up. Aadd9? No problem. D9? Can do. Just teach yourself one new simple chord from that list per week and in a few week's time you will know hundreds of chords!

Funky chunking. Play the G chord using the F shape. 4232. Nice. Now relax the fingers of your fretting hand so they aren't pressing the strings down properly, but are still touching them firmly. Play a quick regular up-down strumming pattern. You should get a rhythmic percussive noise with no notes sounding. Keeping the strumming pattern going, press the fretting fingers down to get the chord sounding properly, then relax them again – back to rhythmic chunking. This is the basis to playing in a more 'funky' style. Either Nile Rogers Chic-style funk or a more rock and roll sound. Squeeze down the chords to the rhythm of the phrase 'shave and a haircut, two bits'. Bo Diddley had a long and lucrative career doing that!

Transposing. Which means changing the key in which the song is to be played. For example, let's say a song is in C. But you are accompanying a singer for whom that is too low. They would like you to play it in D. Where to start? Well if you are using barre chords, just play everything two frets higher!

### **Practice Makes Perfect**

Sorry, but as with everything else, the more you do something the easier it gets. You'll need to practice barre chords if you want to use them. Try playing something you know, but using barre chords where you can.

How about Sloop John B using the F shape for the G (second fret) and the A shape for the D (fifth fret)?

### **A small tip**

You will find as you explore these that trying to use the scale and 'counting up' to find which chord is where is a pain and (in the heat of a session) impractical. So you will actually begin to learn where the common barre chords you use sit on the fret board. You can also find a 'root note' in each chord shape. For example, the root of the A chord is (unsurprisingly) A. That goes for all the A chords (major, minor, diminished etc). Look at the normal A chord (2100). The top and bottom string are both playing the note of A. (G fretted at the second string is A, the other string is an open A). If you know that, then when moving your barre chord up and down the neck you know that if the note on the top string is a D#, then the chord you are playing using the A shape is D#. Of course, to do this properly so that you know where all the possible chords might be requires learning your fret board thoroughly – something I have yet to do myself with any great enthusiasm!

### **A demo is worth a thousand words**

This is a summary of the tutorial I gave to the group on the 18<sup>th</sup> October 2017. I am aware that sometimes it is much easier to understand things if you are shown them rather than reading about them – this document is intended as an aide memoir rather than a stand alone lesson. If you'd like me to explain or demonstrate any of this, please feel free to come and see me at any meeting either before we start or at halftime.

Please excuse any spelling mistakes (or just plain mistakes!) - this is just a quick brain dump of what I said on the night!

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