

TECHNIQUE

**MATT PALMER**

**On A-M-I Scales**



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*“MY FINGERS ARE STILL REALLY TOUCHING THE STRING, BUT THERE’S NO PRESSURE. THAT’S HOW YOU PLAY LIGHT. LIGHT IS FAST”.*

## **LESSON DESCRIPTION**

In this lesson on A-M-I Scales, Matt Palmer details the specific approach he takes to play scales with minimal physical and cognitive effort. He talks about the fingerings he uses, how he modifies the rest stroke into a “power stroke”, and how he thinks of his strokes as one smooth motion.

Matt goes beyond technical jargon and demonstrates this technique as it would be seen in actual repertoire. This method is highly flexible, consistent, and requires very little work to apply to new modes or keys once mastered initially.

By the end of the lesson you’ll have a basic introduction to the topic of A-M-I scales, and the resources you need to begin exploring them on your own.



# ABOUT YOUR INSTRUCTOR

Matt Palmer has appeared as a soloist throughout the United States, Europe, Mexico, Canada, South America, and the Caribbean.

An active performer and winner of numerous guitar competitions, Matt Palmer has gained worldwide recognition as a virtuosic and soulful concert artist. Matt Palmer holds the Doctor of Musical Arts degree from The University of Arizona. His pioneering guitar method, *The Virtuoso Guitarist*, has been recognized as a valuable addition to guitar pedagogy.

## OUTLINE

1. Introduction to AMI
2. Left Hand Fingerings
3. Efficiency
4. Right Hand Fingerings
5. Applied to Repertoire
6. Alternate Fingerings
7. Summary

# INTRODUCTION TO AMI

In this lesson, Matt Palmer is going to talk about his fundamental approach to playing AMI scales.

In this method, the three right hand fingers are called 'A M I', (A = ring, M= middle, I=pointer), and the fingers always move in that direction on the strings. The right hand is paired with a 3 note per string scale system in the left hand.



To explore AMI technique in detail, Matt encourages all students to practice the AMI scales contained in his book, "Virtuoso Guitarist: Volume 1", if they want to go as far as they can on the subject. Today's lesson, however, is just to get you started practicing the subject and applying it.

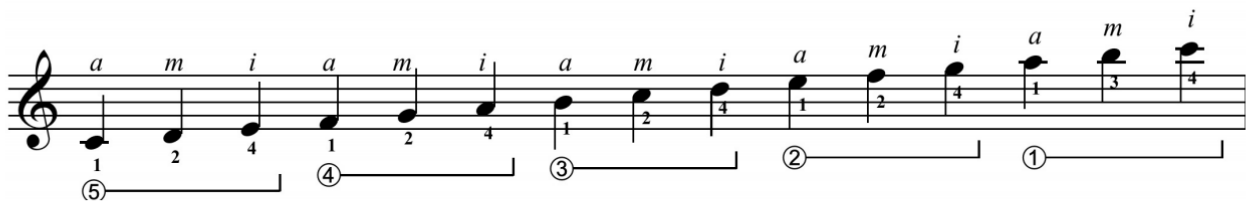
As mentioned before, when using the AMI technique, play three notes on every string. Matt begins with a two octave C Major Scale as an example. Several more common fingerings of this scale might not be as effective (or even possible) with AMI, so consider instead the following method.



# LEFT HAND FINGERINGS



We'll discuss the left hand first. While playing the scale ascending, start on the first finger and end on the fourth finger for each string. The note in between is determined by the interval. A whole step, as in D-E in the start of the scale, is easiest to do with fingers two and four. A half step, as in B-C at the very top of the scale, is easiest to do with fingers three and four. When we put these fingerings together across the entirety of two octaves ascending, we'd play 1-2-4 four times, and 1-3-4 at the very top.



## KEY TAKEAWAY

When playing AMI scales, your right hand plucks three notes for every string, always in the same direction, while your left hand fingering is either 1-2-4 or 1-3-4, depending on the intervals involved.



# EFFICIENCY



This fingering is very simple, which makes it predictable and consistent across any mode or key. Developing a technique that's both flexible and physically easy gives you a lot of bang for your buck, and is very beneficial to spend time mastering. Matt speaks about the motion in the hands using the term "one motion". This idea, mentioned in his book, applies to both hands while playing AMI scales. Think of the 1-2-4 motion as one sweep, executed by simply throwing your weight from one side of the hand to the other. This one action generates three notes, and is simply repeated on each string. Keep the motion light, easy, and effortless, always playing with one finger down at a time.

Don't work to lift each finger but just release the pressure. When Matt's fingers aren't in use, they're still lightly touching the string, but without any pressure. This allows him to play light, and the lighter he can play, the less work he has to do to play faster.

The descending version of this scale is nearly the same idea. The fingering is only reversed; 4-3-1 at the start, followed by 4-2-1 all the way down.

① ————— ② ————— ③ ————— ④ ————— ⑤ —————



# RIGHT HAND FINGERINGS



Matt now brings his attention to the right hand. The fingers will always move in the direction indicated by AMI (ring, middle, index), towards the thumb.

Again, think of this motion as one gesture- as if you're closing a fist. As you begin practicing, begin slowly, planting each finger firmly into the string. Always feel the motion as 'one thing', no matter the tempo. As you speed up, put the two hands in use together. The result should always be three notes- clean, light, and easy. Matt demonstrates the full scale, and points out that his stroke is a bit unique.

He doesn't play a traditional rest stroke, but something he calls a "power stroke"- a hybrid of free and rest strokes. This allows for a big sound without going as far with his fingers as he would on a rest stroke. While many guitarists have had success using rest stroke, it is, in his opinion, labored and more difficult to achieve. He keeps his thumb close by his other fingers, in a more natural position.



Matt discourages students from ever planting the thumb on the sixth string while playing on the first and second string with the others, because it changes the angle the fingers approach the strings from.

If he wants to dig in and really get more volume, he pushes downward, generating more vertical motion of the string over the sound hole.



As you begin to get comfortable with the major scale, try to play all the major modes as well. Play these all the way up to the very top range of the instrument.

## APPLIED TO REPERTOIRE

Matt talks about how to apply these scales to actual pieces. It's common for players to believe that they can't apply AMI to a song they're working on that might have more specific fingering requirements. However, it's almost always the case that by modifying the number of notes you place on the initial string you can use this technique somehow. It might be three as we've done, or two, or even one.



If you know how many notes you have to start with, you can map out the scale and apply the following changes. If you start with 3, apply AMI. If you start with 2, use MI, and if you have to begin a scale with one, use just I. Either way, remember to refinger the scale in your left hand. If beginning with one finger, you also have the option to begin the scale with just P (your pinky) instead of I.

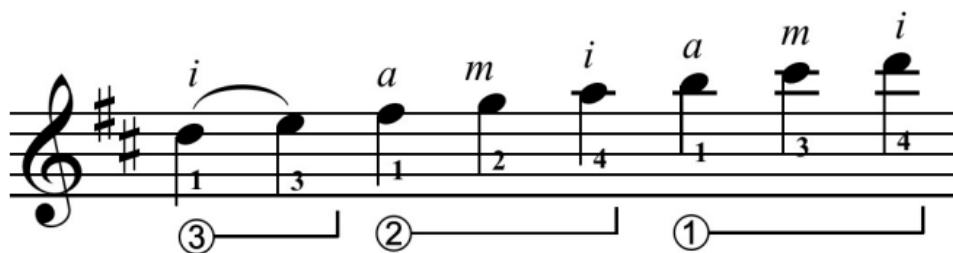
## KEY TAKEAWAY

AMI can be applied to any playing situation if modified slightly so that it starts with a different number of notes on the first string.

# ALTERNATE FINGERINGS

While using AMI, avoid playing M or I on a different string as A. A large part of the efficiency of this technique comes from the three fingers plucking on the same string. A lot of clarity and speed is lost if your fingers have to change planes in the middle of what should still be considered “one motion”.

There is another option if you must begin with two notes on a string. You can begin the passage with a slur on the I finger.



He demonstrates this at work on a D Major Scale. You can also play the first three notes as a slur, and continue with MI-AMI. Matt prefers I on the first string because of the freedom it allows to perhaps add a bass note on the other strings.

The same ideas apply to descending scales as well. Take a descending B Locrian scale as an example; if he must begin the scale with two notes on a string, he might start with MI or with a slur on I.

As you descend (or even ascend), the arm is moving at a constant rate, so that you'll always be right above the next string you need to attack.


## SUMMARY



In conclusion, Matt recommends practicing all scales and modes, and looking at his book for more ideas, applications, and details. Also, do some work on the alternate fingerings (MI or a slur on I, I or P).

Finally, start to practice what Matt calls "guitar scales" These are simple shapes on each string (1-2-4 or 1-3-4 on all six strings, for example) played in tempo, one after the other.

Try practicing these types of simple licks on each string just to work on feeling comfortable with your fingers. They can be as small as two or three note cells or short chromatic exercises, in any combinations or number of strings you want.



# RESOURCES



## **Tengyue Zhang's A-M-I Scale Exercise**

Get another perspective on this virtuosic technique from another incredible player, TY Zhang!

## **Scott Tennant's lesson On Tremolo**

As Matt explains, it's helpful to be good at tremolo to develop your A-M-I scales. Check out this lesson from the tremolo master, Scott Tennant!



# NOTES



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