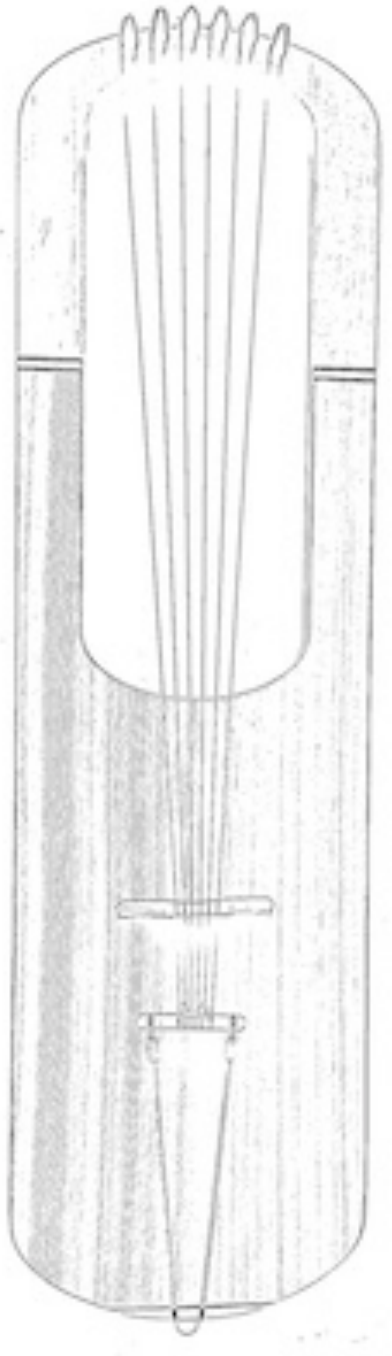
A Handbook for 6-String Lyre: Tunings and Chords



Introduction

This book is a guide to playing the 6-string lyre, focusing on chord formations (plucked or strummed) in seven likely tunings in four commony lyre keys. It was written with the Anglo-Saxon lyre in mind, but can apply it to any 6-string lyre, or zither, or harp. And if you have a 5-string instrument like a kantele or gusli, or 7-string lyre or more, you can still use these charts as a basis to map out your own chords and tunings.

Attribution

This book was initially compiled by **u/TapTheForwardAssist** on Reddit's r/lyres. Further attribution will be added as this draft is expanded. This work is released under Creative Commons Att 4.0 Int'l. If you modify it for another product, please retain the original license and attribution. The cover image is a rendering of a photograph by Michael J. King.

If you have feedback on this work, or would like to convert it to a more visually appealing format instead of my ASCII-like layout, the best way to reach me is at u/TapTheForwardAssist on Reddit.

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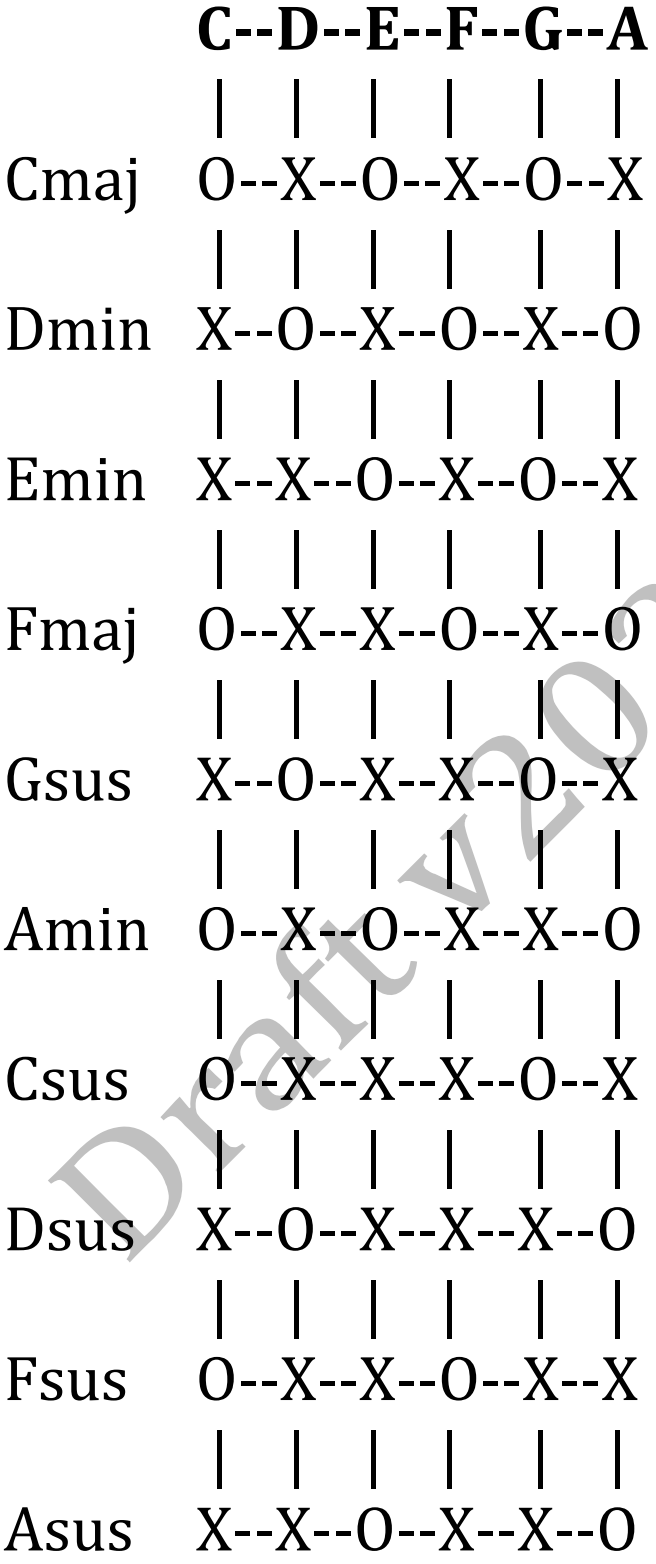
How to read the charts

The charts represent the lyre as you are looking at it face-to-face. While a lyre can be strung either direction, I've made the charts guitar-style with the lowest notes on the left and highest on the right.

Here are what the shorthand terms mean:

- X = if strumming, muffle this string with a fingertip so it makes no noise. If plucking a chord, do not pluck this note.
- O = if strumming, leave this string open as you strum across all six strings. If plucking a chord, pluck these notes marked as O
- maj = major chord, a "happy sounding" chord
- min = minor chord, a "sad sounding" chord
- sus = a "suspended chord" has the root and fifth of the chord, but no third, so it is neither major nor minor, and can be used to subtitute for either.
- hexatonic = a scale that has six notes, generally a normal diatonic scale but missing the highest note. Example: C-D-E-F-G-A is hexatonic because it is missing the B.
- pentatonic = a scale that has five notes. On a 6-string lyre, this means we can repeat the octave of the tonic note since we have an extra string to use, so CDEGAC for example (missing the F and the B both).

Cmaj Hexatonic



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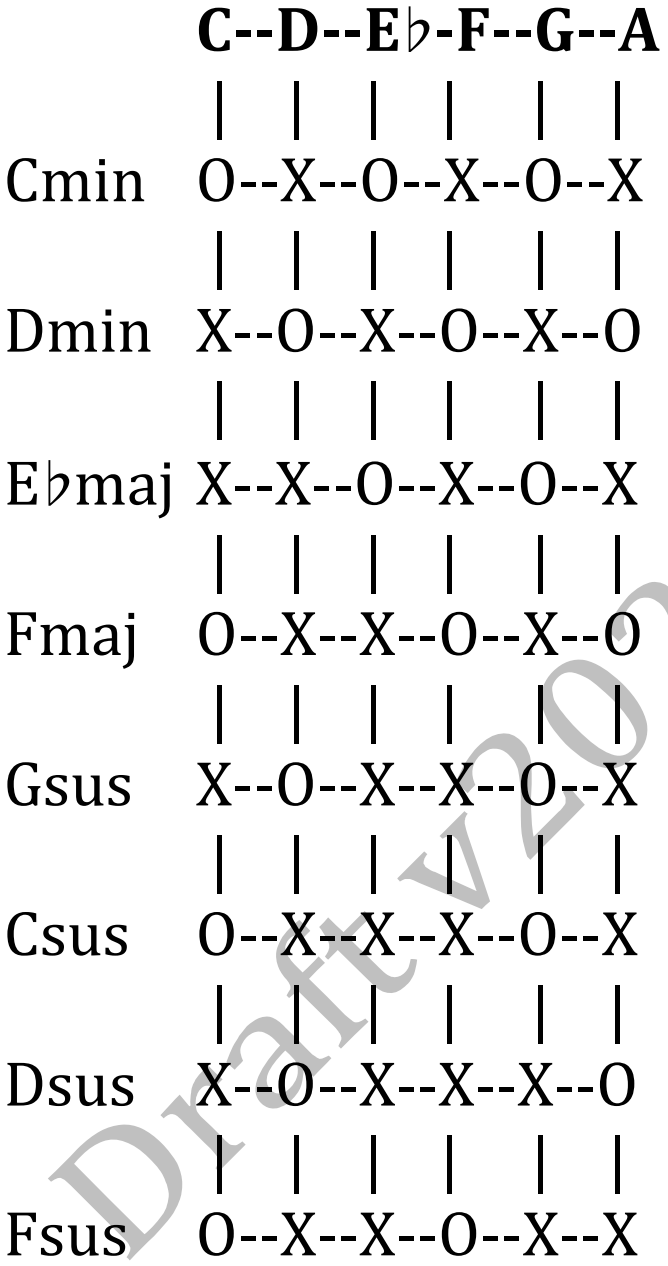
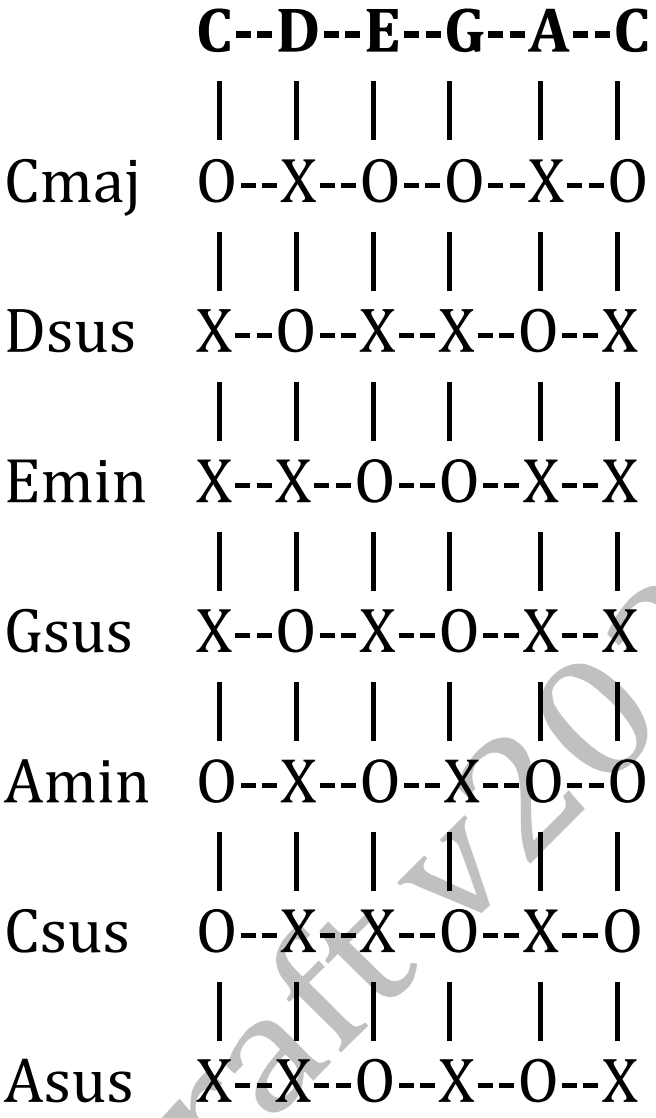
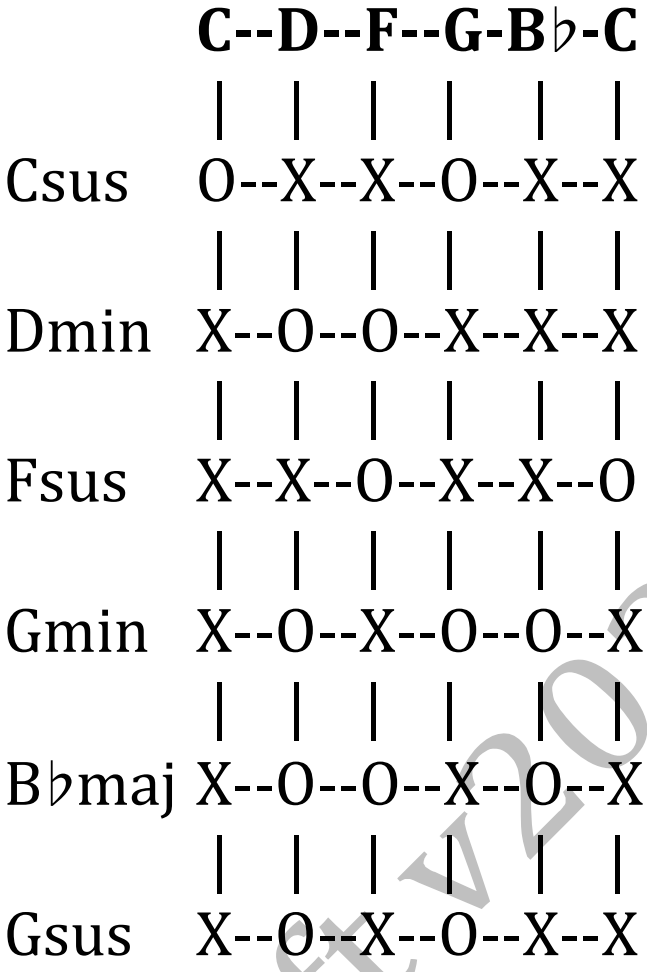
Cmin Hexatonic



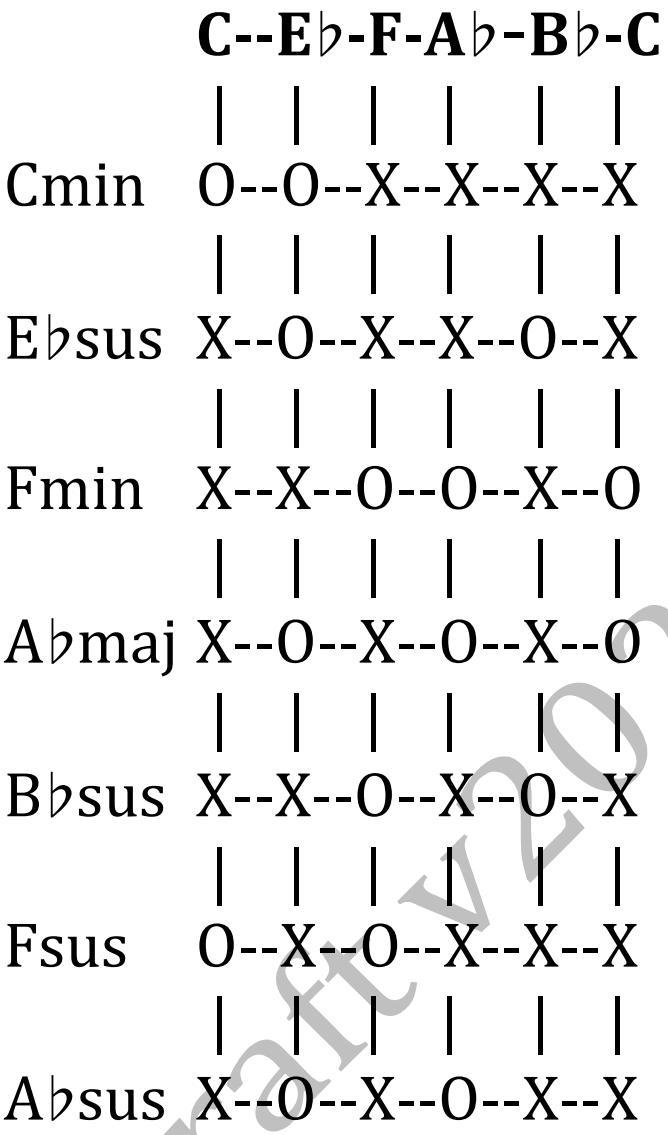
C Pentatonic Ionian (Major)



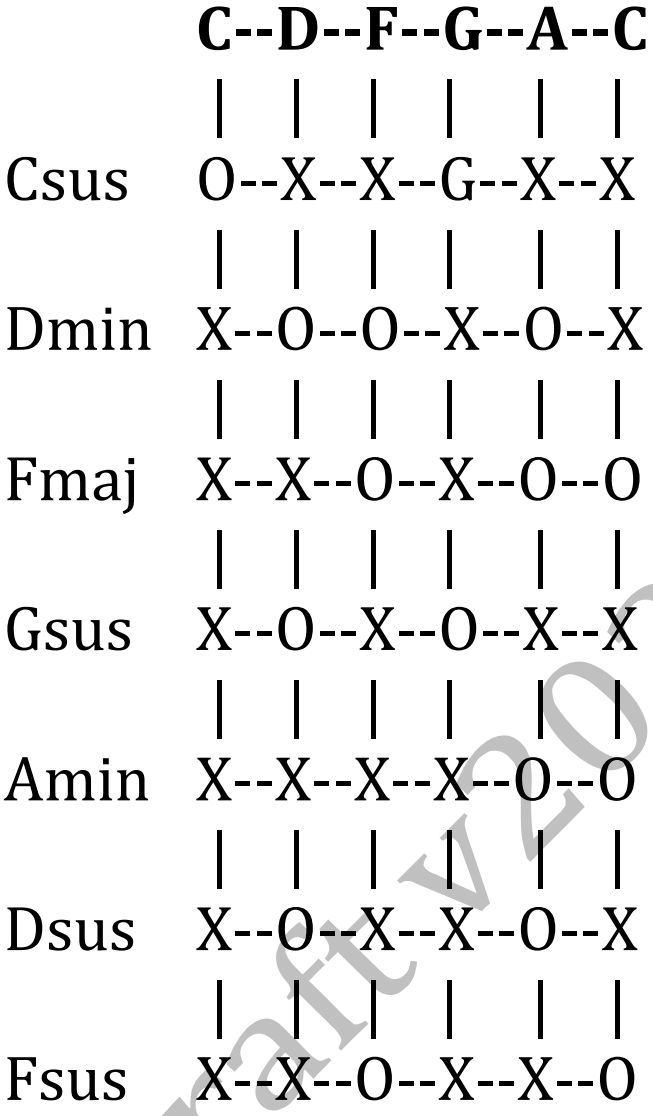
C Pentatonic Dorian



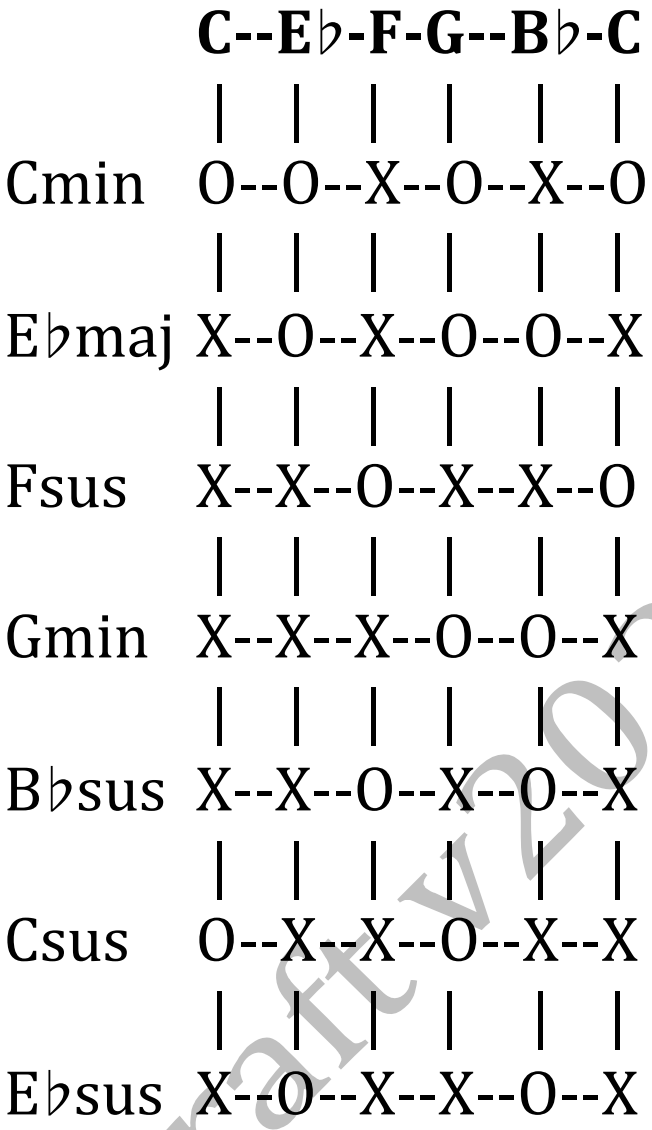
C Pentatonic Phrygian



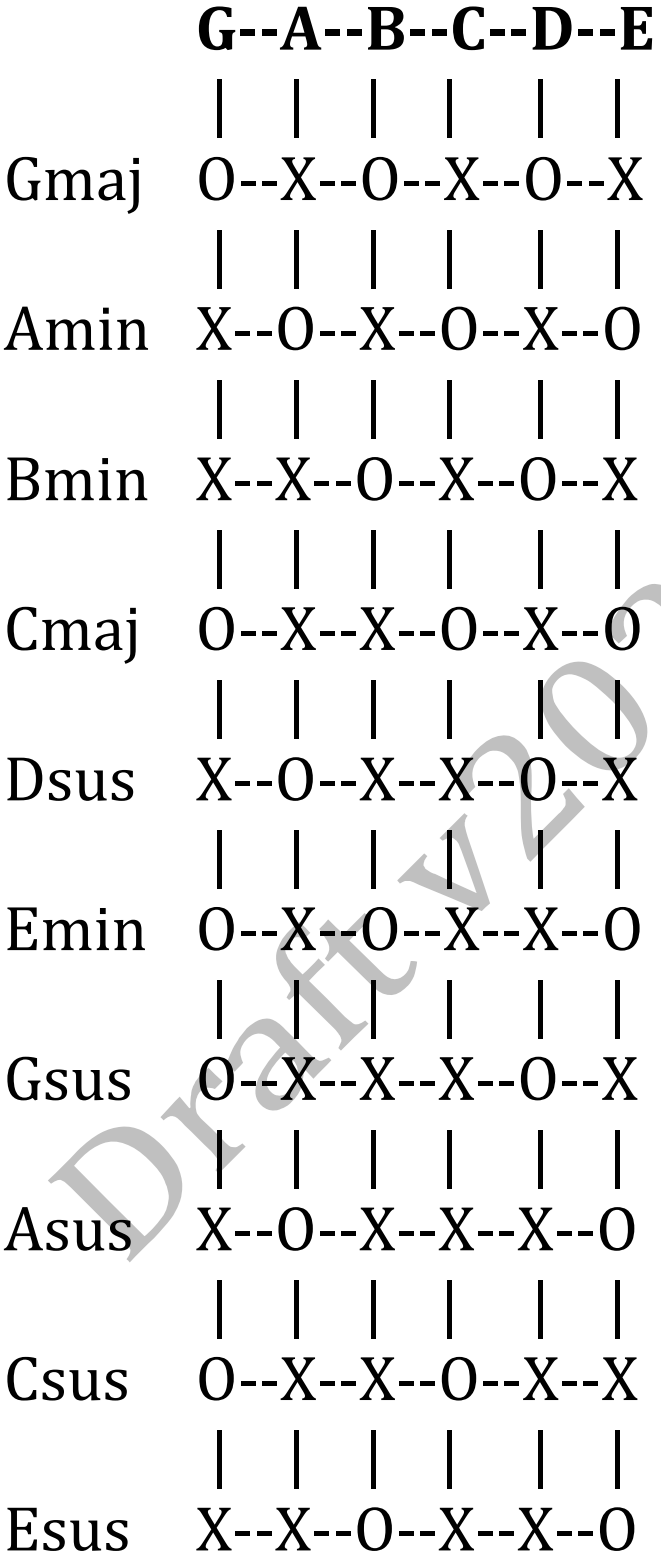
C Pentatonic Mixolydian



C Pentatonic Aeolian (Minor)



Gmaj Hexatonic



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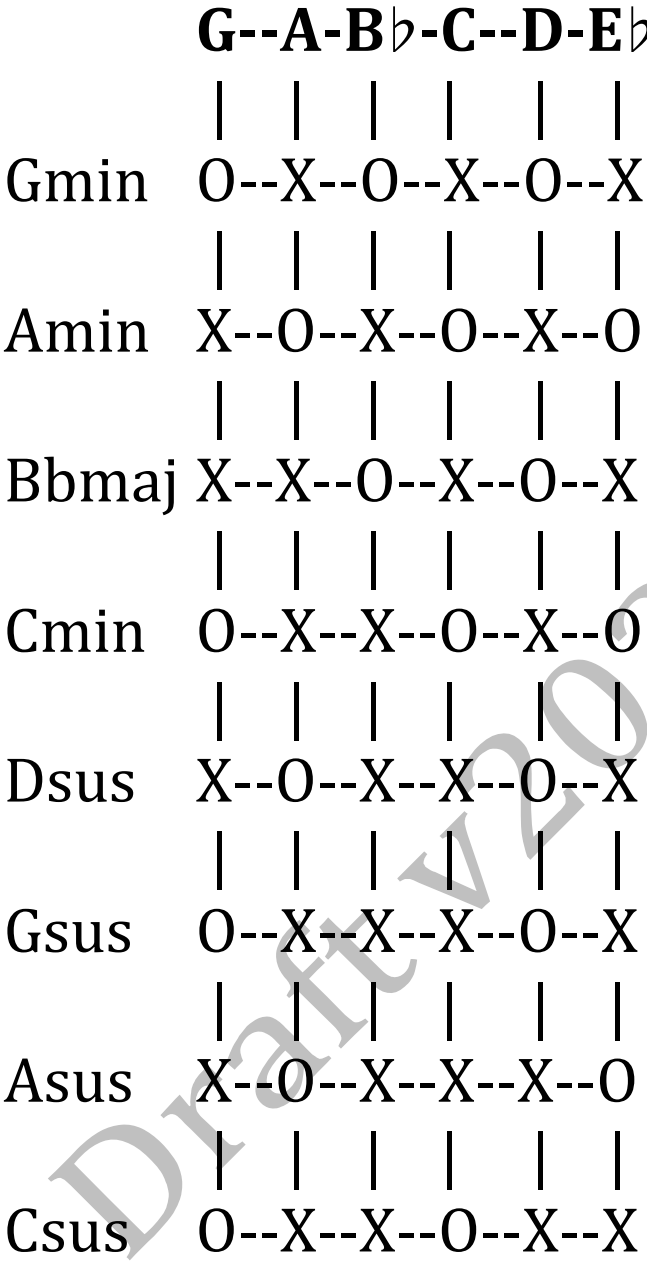

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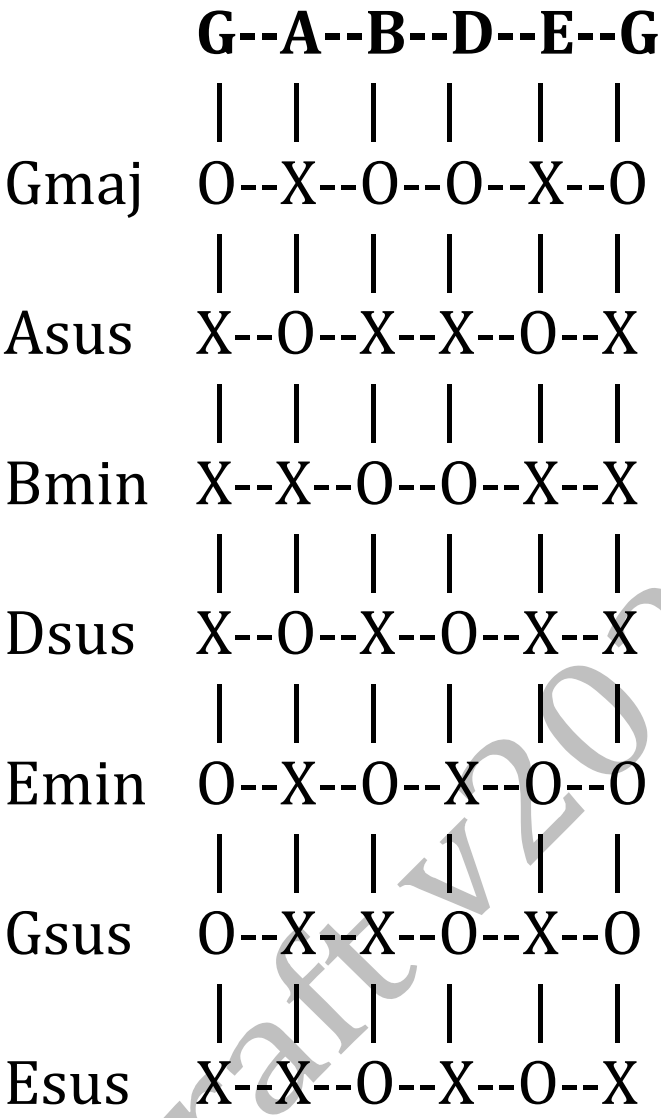
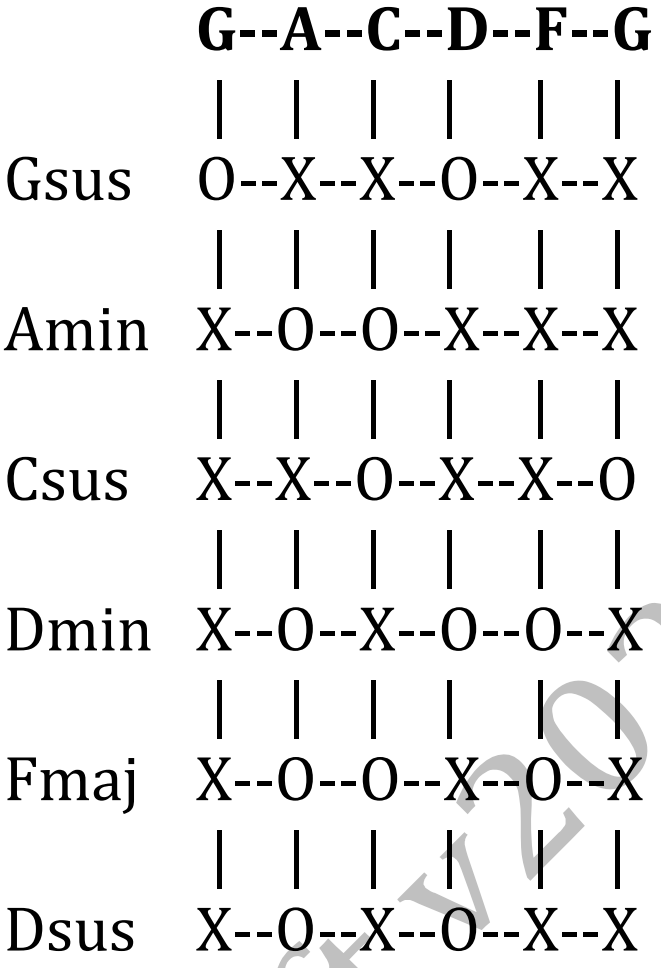


G Pentatonic Dorian



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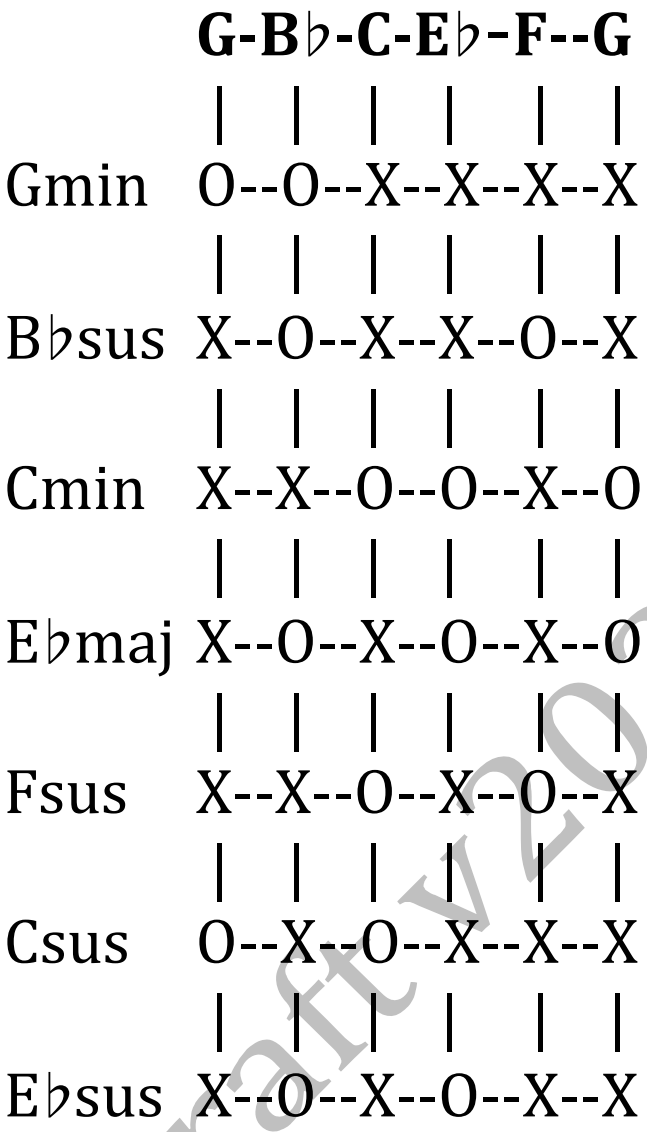

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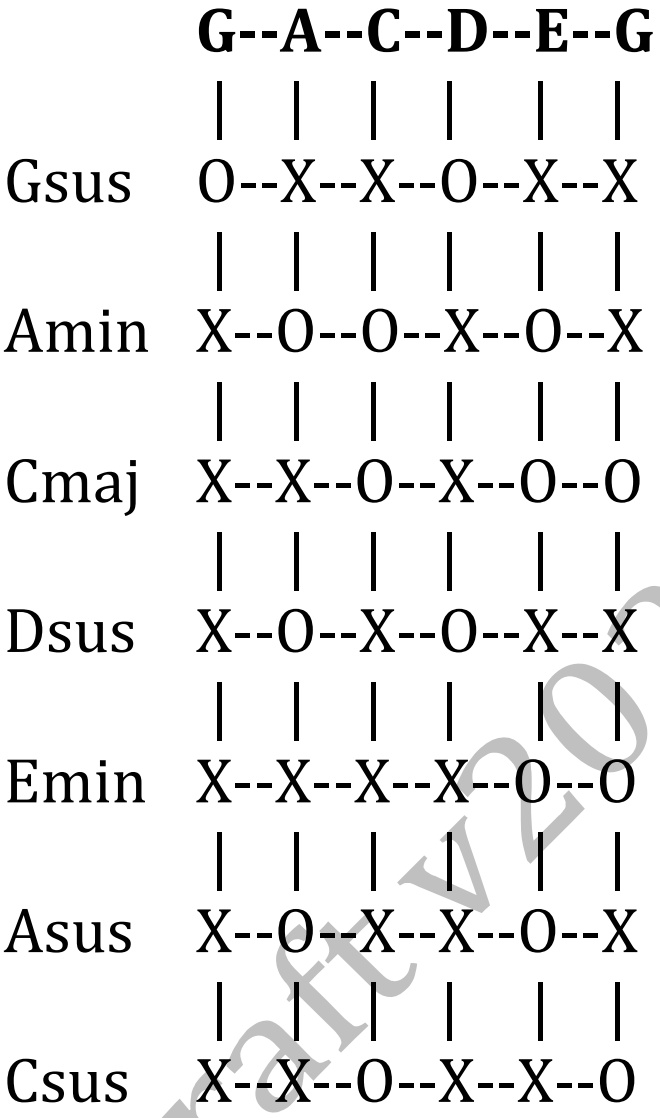
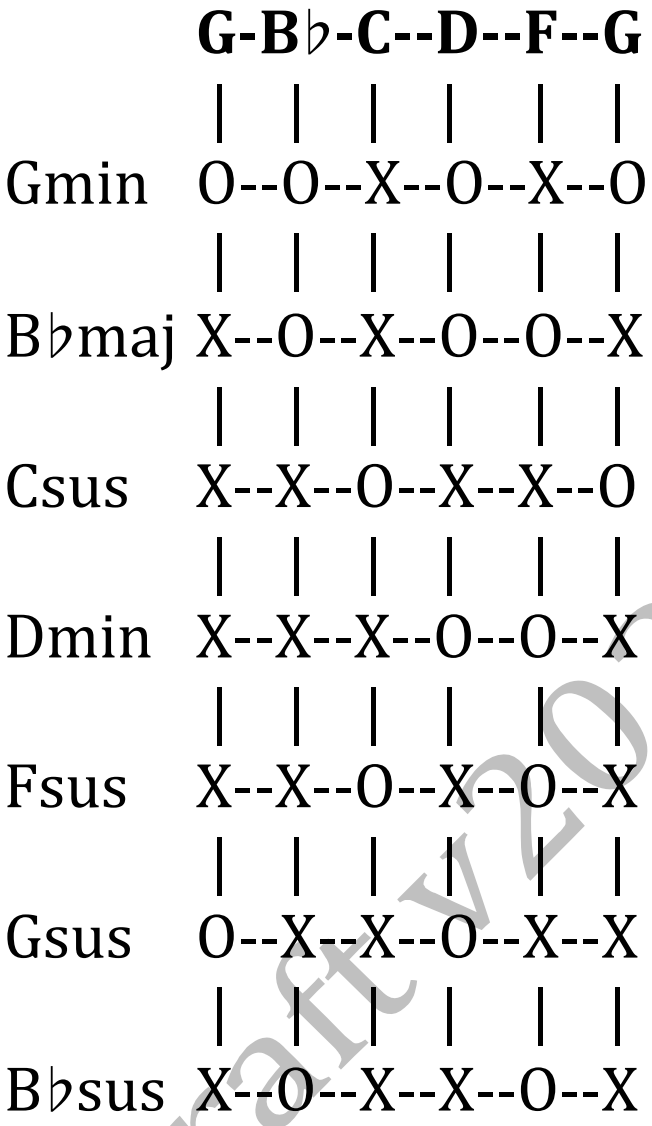
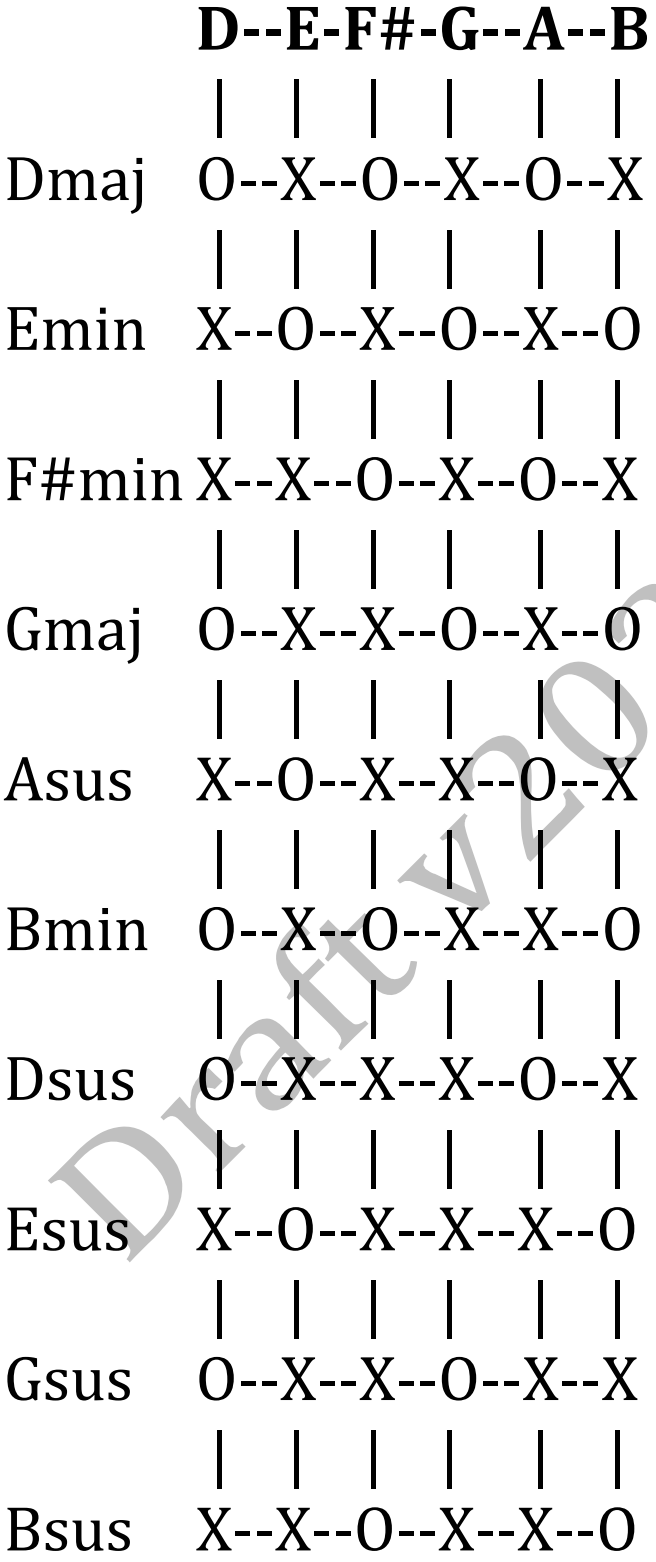


G Pentatonic Aeolian (Minor)



Dmaj Hexatonic



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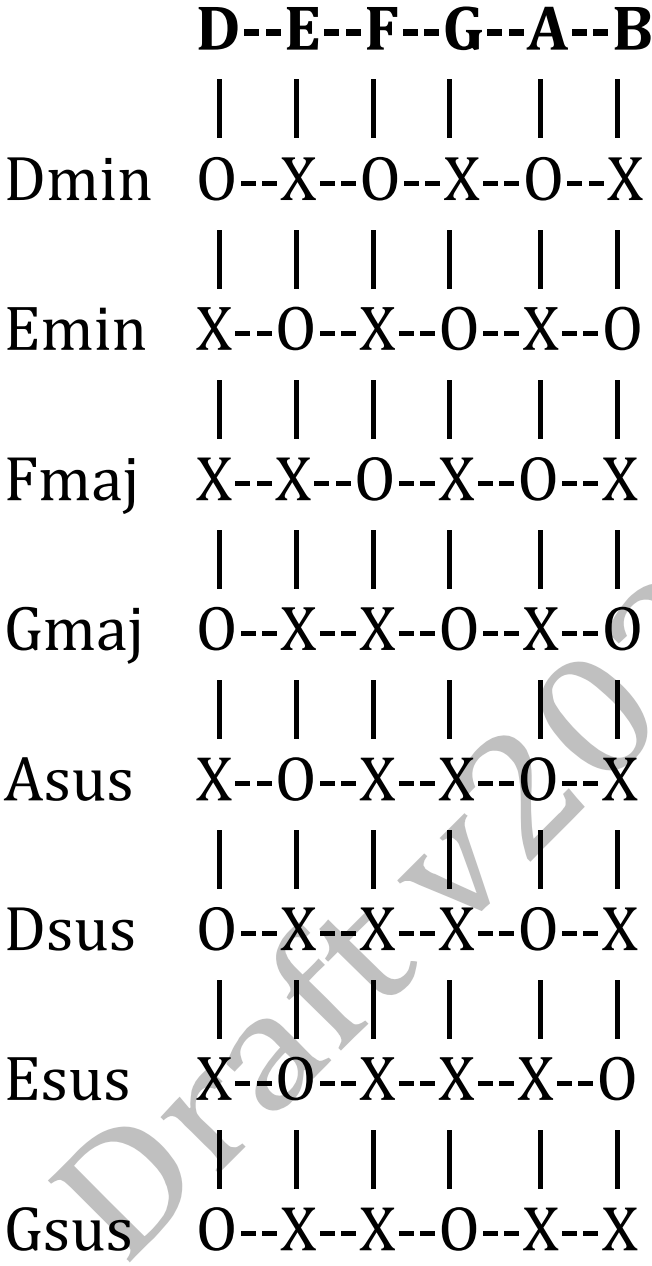
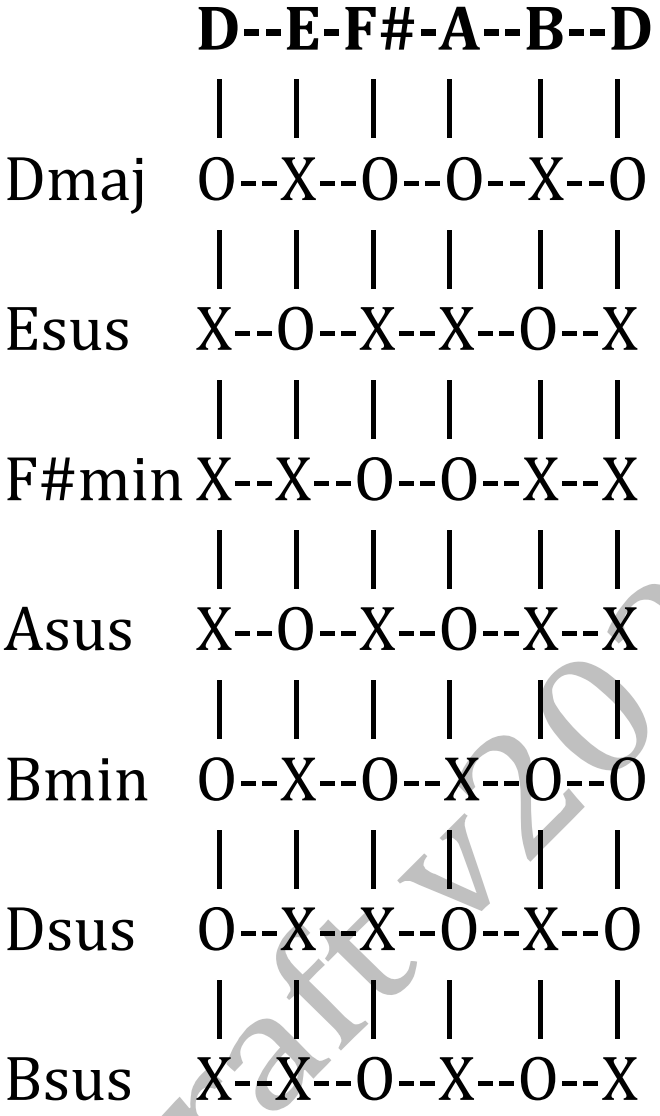


D Pentatonic Ionian (Major)



D Pentatonic Dorian

```
          D--E--G--A--C--D
          |  |  |  |  |  |
Dsus      O--X--X--O--X--X
          |  |  |  |  |  |
Emin      X--O--O--X--X--X
          |  |  |  |  |  |
Gsus      X--X--O--X--X--O
          |  |  |  |  |  |
Amin      X--O--X--O--O--X
          |  |  |  |  |  |
Cmaj      X--O--O--X--O--X
          |  |  |  |  |  |
Asus      X--O--X--O--X--X
```

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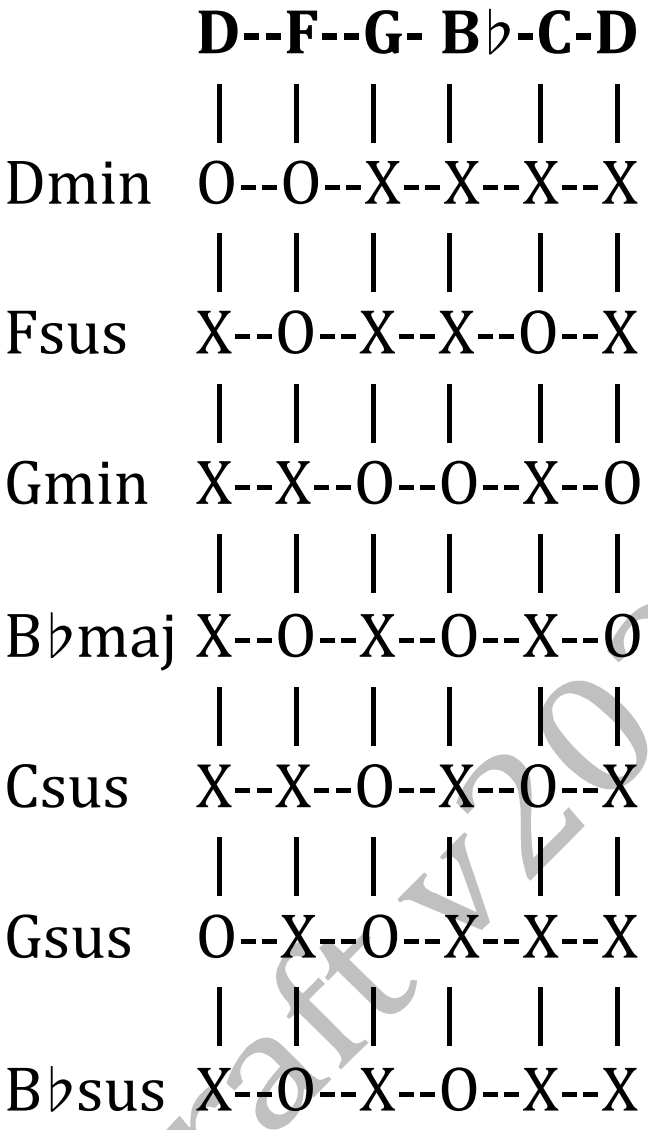

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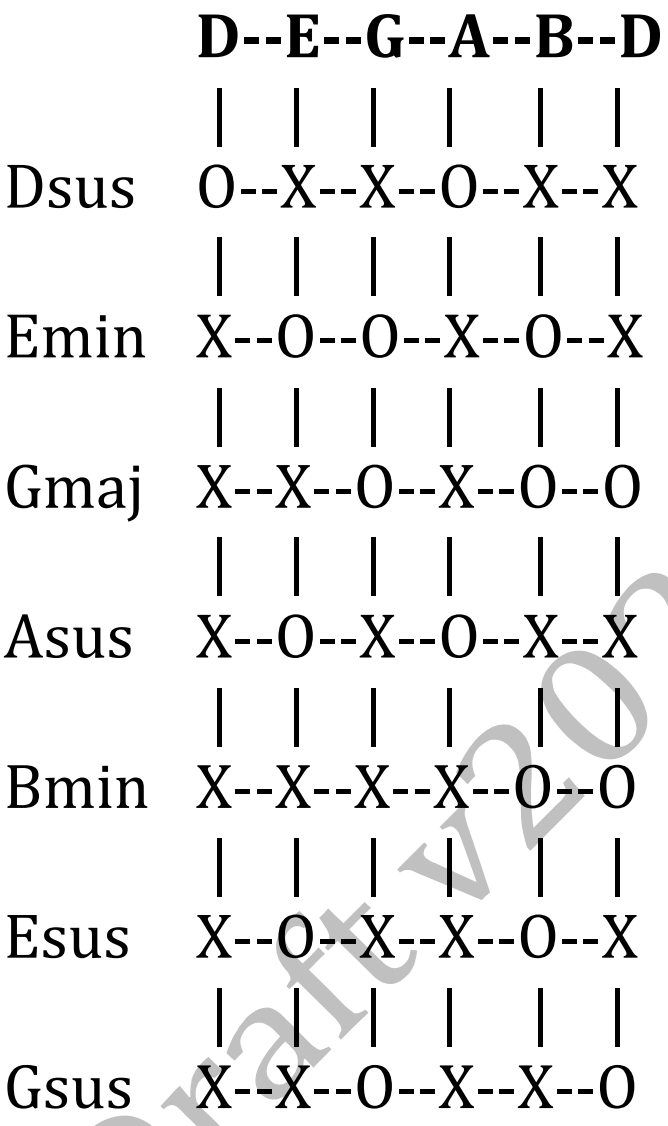
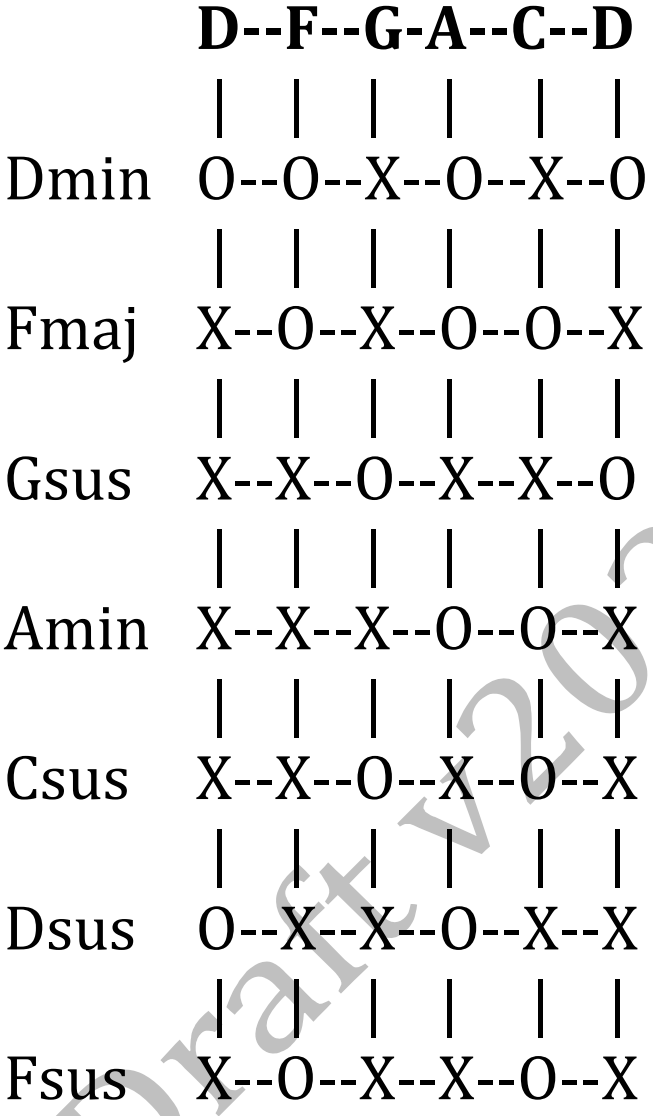
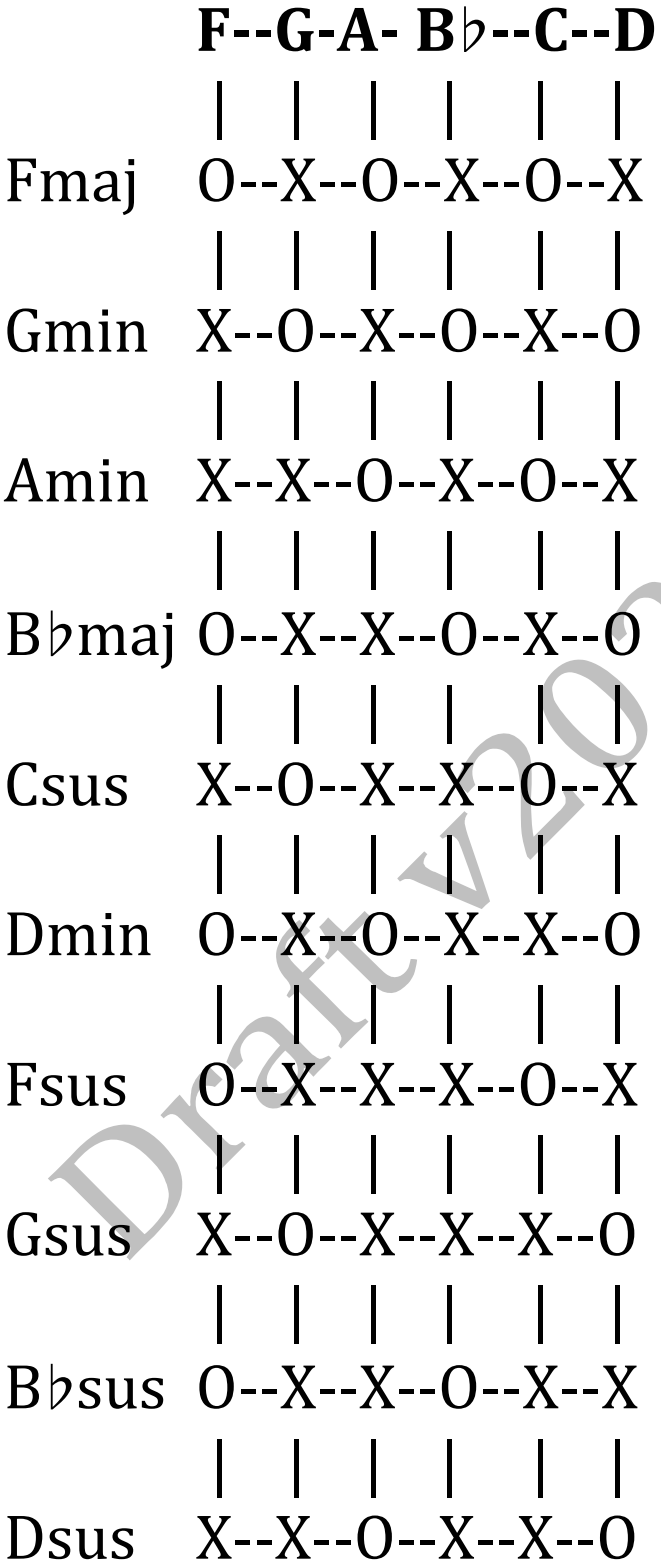


D Pentatonic Aeolian (Minor)



Fmaj Hexatonic



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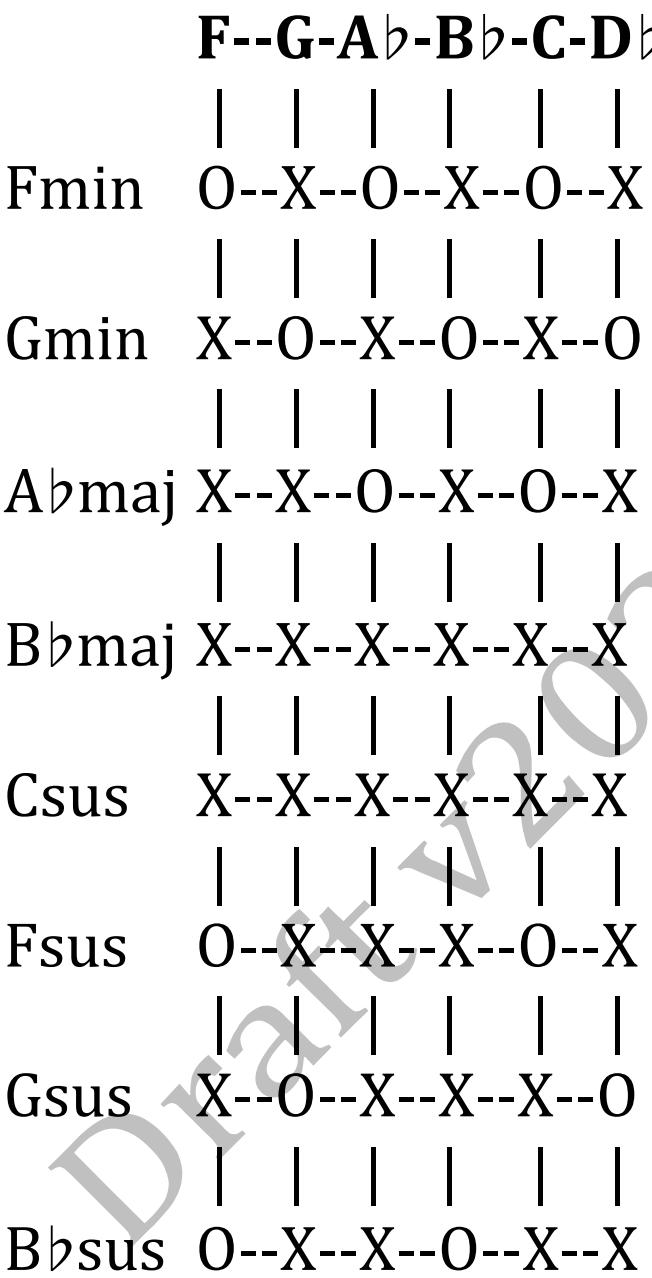
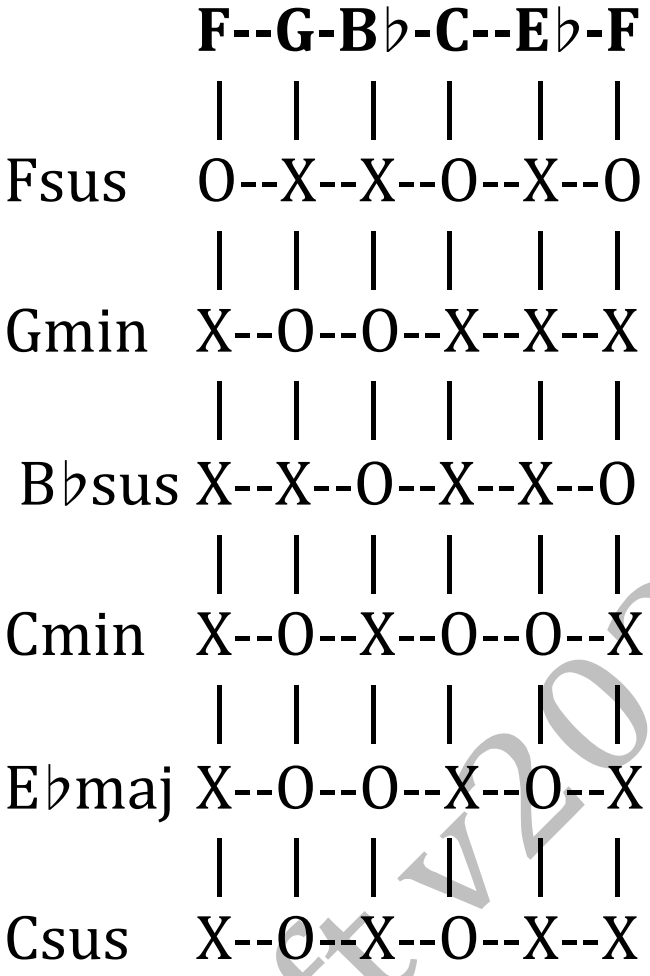


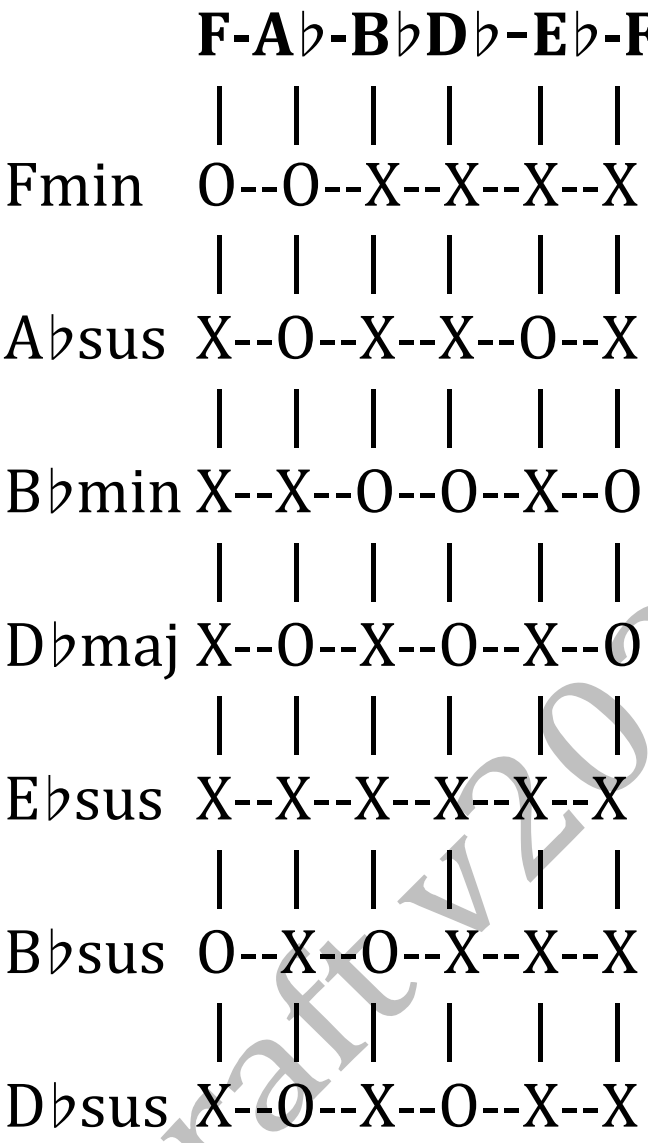
F Pentatonic Ionian (Major)

```
          F--G--A--C--D--F
          |  |  |  |  |  |
Fmaj      O--X--O--O--X--O
          |  |  |  |  |  |
Gsus      X--O--X--X--O--X
          |  |  |  |  |  |
Amin      X--X--O--O--X--X
          |  |  |  |  |  |
Csus      X--O--X--O--X--X
          |  |  |  |  |  |
Dmin      O--X--O--X--O--O
          |  |  |  |  |  |
Fsus      O--X--X--O--X--O
          |  |  |  |  |  |
Dsus      X--O--X--X--O--X
```

F Pentatonic Dorian



F Pentatonic Phrygian



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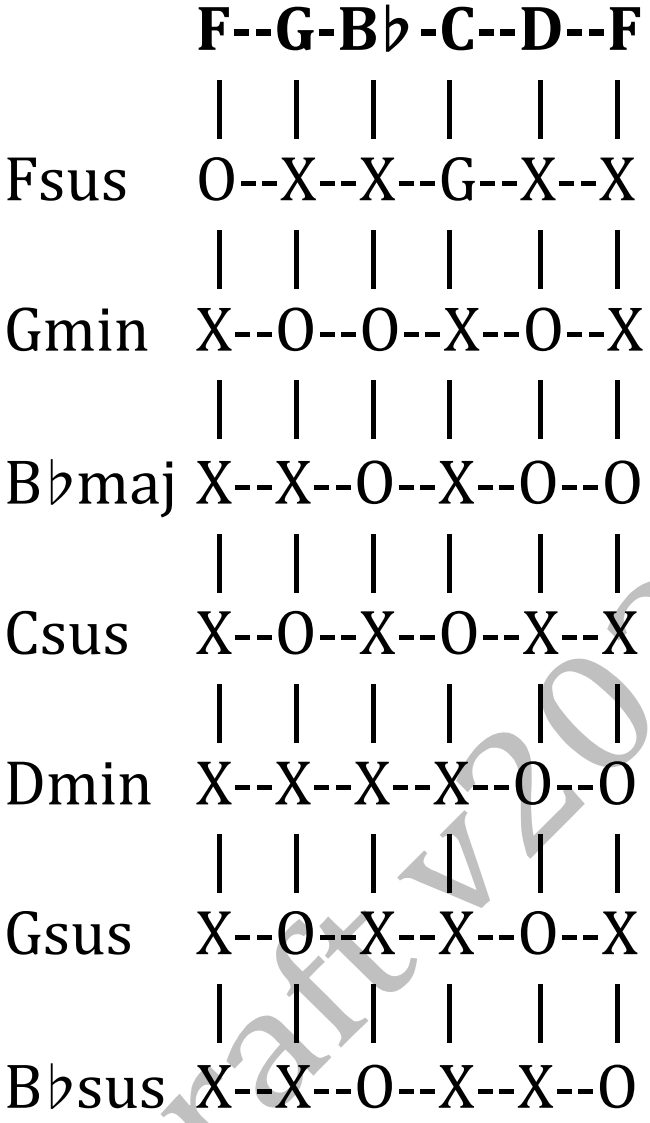

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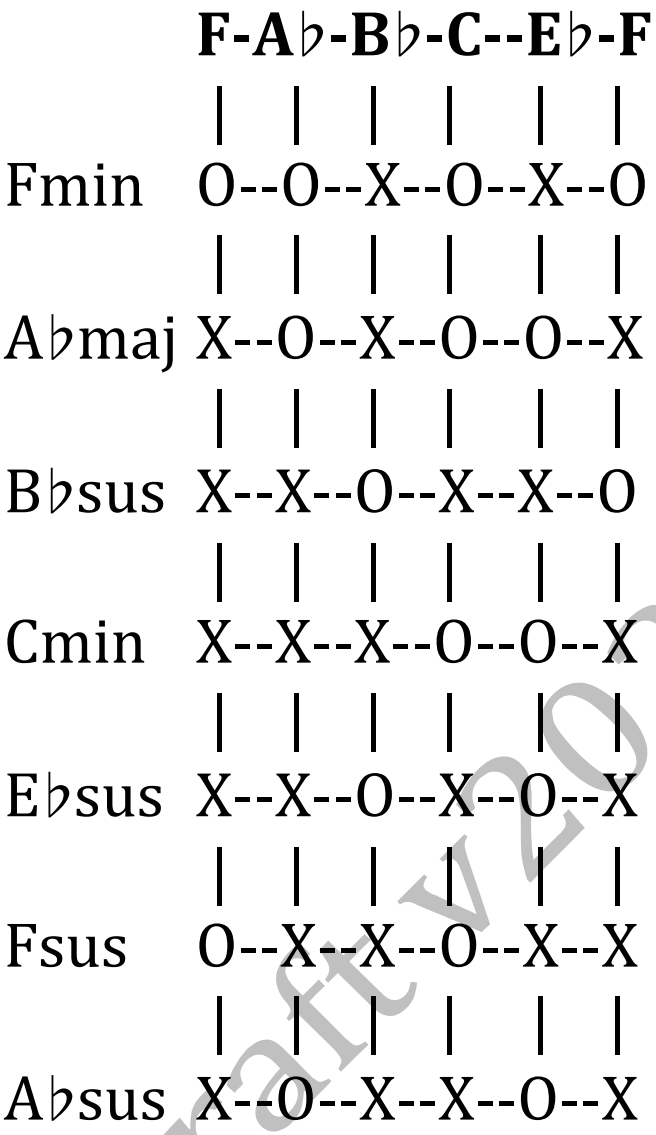

Pitching

"Pitch", not to be confused with "note" refers in the modern day to how many hertz (Hz) a material (your string) is vibrating at as it produces the note. For much of history, this really wasn't standardized on any large scale, so instruments were tuned to some local central authority, often the pipe organ of the main cathedral in town. As you can imagine, this caused some trouble, as some instruments are harder to re-tune than others, making it tough to have to adjust as one traveled. It wasn't until 1939 that an international conference concluded that the A above middle C would be pitched at 440hz, solidifying the global standard.

Now, if you're just playing with yourself, or another easily tunable instrument (such as most strings), it isn't really vital to be in A=440, nobody will much care if your A is closer to 446 or whatnot. But if you're playing for a YouTube clip and you want viewers to be able to practice along with you, you want to ensure your "A" matches the A on a tuner, which as a default will be at 440Hz.

There are a few exceptions to this standard: some Baroque instruments (such as specific models of recorder flutes) are A=415Hz for reasons not worth getting into, so if you're playing with a Baroque musician, you might want to set your tuner (assuming you have a slightly more ornate tuning app on your phone, beyond a purely basic one) for A=415.

The other exception is A=432Hz. I will say right out I'm not a believer in that tuning being somehow magical, but there are a body of musicians, including some lyre players, who believe that A=432Hz somehow is in resonance with the vibration of the universe and all that, and somehow sounds better. They have all kinds of articles and YouTube clips making that case. I don't believe it, you're welcome to believe what you want, but I would suggest you try some double-blind studies on yourself if you want to see if it holds true.

So in summary: A=440 is the international standard, and any tuning fork or tuning app not otherwise specifying Hz can be assumed to be basing its scale around A=440. Primary exceptions being A=415 for Baroque, and some mystical believers arguing a unique quality for A=432.

Temperament

This section is going to get a little complex about music theory, though I'll keep it as simple as I can. If you read this and don't understand it, you can happily go on your merry way just doing what you're doing without this mattering much. But if you want to mull on and digest it, this is a way to make your instrument be incrementally more in-tune with just slightly sweeter harmonies than it normally would have.

Even before Concert Pitch was settled, musicians struggled with the fact that an instrument that sounded great playing in Key of C might not sound great playing in Key of B. The reason for that is the spiraling structure of musical scales means that tones are not all equally spaced apart, so when you structure the scale so that given tones are in the "right" place, relative to each other, for Key of C, they're in somewhat the wrong place for Key of G or B, for example. When notes of a scale are set up for maximum sweet resonance for a *specific* scale, we call that "Just Temperament". But the problem with Just is that it "just" sounds perfect in its origin key, decent in some other keys, terrible in a couple keys.

The solution to this struggle was "Equal Temperament." ET means that rather than making some intervals perfectly "sweet" and allowing others to be discordant, they spread out the scale so each pitch is "equally" far apart from its neighbor. So you get an array of notes that sounds "pretty good" in every scale, but not perfect in any scale, but most importantly not at all bad in any scale. Most modern recorded music you hear will be in ET, and listeners have become accustomed to it, but some recordings are in JT and at a careful listen will sound slightly sweeter.

I emphasize this is not a mystical thing like A=432Hz being somehow "better", this is just mathematics. Our common everyday modern scales are slightly compromised in sweetness to allow flexibility in changing keys. Now, on a lyre, we're already limited in terms of what keys we can play in unless we re-tune, so if you're playing alone, or which an instrument of unfixed pitch (voice, violin, etc), you can improve the sweetness of your intervals between notes by using a slightly more elaborate tuning app which gives you the option to switch from Equal to Just.

If you're curious as to the difference, there are many (again, scientific, not woo) YouTube examples as to how Just Temperament aligns vibrations in intervals more uniformly, but again at the cost of only sounding great in a few keys and not being able to play sweetly in others. But again, this is a lyre, it's playing in limited keys anyway. And if your tuning app is even fancier and has other temperaments, by all means try Pythagorean Temperament, Quarter-Comma Meantone, whatever you like, and see which ones work the best for your style of play, as long as you aren't bound by having to play with other instruments of more fixed scale (such as a guitar or piano).

Cmaj Hexatonic: Additional Chords

Here are a number of chord formations possible in the Cmaj Hexatonic tuning. 99% of our readers will be fine with just maj/min/sus chords, but for those who want to explore, I worked out mathematically most of the possible chords in this tuning, and you're welcome to diagram them yourself if you care to. The notes of the chord are given, followed by the chord name.

ACE Am
ACEG Am7
ACEGD Am11
ADEG A7sus4
ADA Asus4
CA Amin
CD Csus2
CDA D7sus
CDEFGA Dm9/11
CDG Csus2
CE Cmaj
CEA C6
CEF Cadd4
CEFA C6
CEFGAD C6/9
CEG Cmaj
CEGA C6
CEGAD C6/9
CEGBD Cmaj9
CF Fsus
CFA Fmaj
CFG Csus4
CG Csus
CGA Am7
D7sus4
DA Dsus
DE Dsus2
DEA Dsus2
DEAC D7sus2
DEFACE D9sus2
DEG Em7
DF Dmin
DFA D7sus
DFA Dm
DFAC Dmin7
DFACB Dm13
DFACE Dm9
DFACG Dm11
DFC Dm7
DG Gsus
DGA Dsus4
DGAC D7sus4
DGACE D9sus4
EA Asus
EF Esus(b2)
EFA Fmaj7
EG Emin
EGA A7sus
FA Fmaj
FAC Fmaj
FACD F6
FACDG F6/9
FACE Fmaj7
FACED Fmaj13
FACEG Fmaj9
FG Fsus2
FGA G9sus2
FGC Fsus2
GA Gsus2
GAD Gsus2
GADF G7sus2
GADFA G9sus2
GCD Gsus4
GCDF G7sus4
GCDFA Dm11