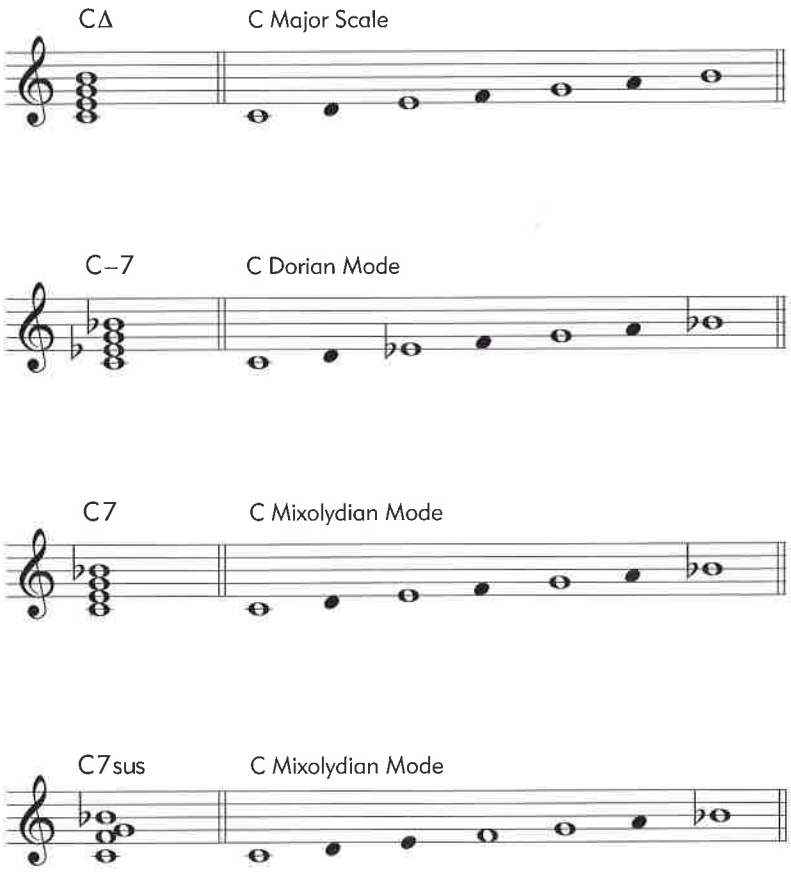
CHORD/SCALE RELATIONSHIPS

With each chord there are certain scales or modes that are complementary. Often there are several different scales that sound good over the same chord, but for now, only the most basic chord/scale relationships will be presented. A more complete and thorough discussion can be found elsewhere in this series. With major chords and major seventh chords, the major scale sounds good. With minor seventh chords, the Dorian mode is most compatible and with dominant and suspended seventh chords, Mixolydian works well.

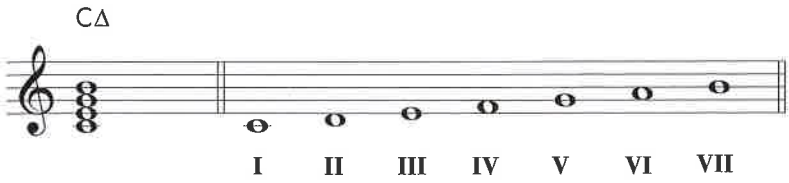
Observe in the following example how each chord member is present in the related scale, and how the other notes, represented by blackened note heads, fill in the gaps between the chord members. (Example 17)

Example 17 - Basic chord/scale relationships



When matching scales with chords, an important point must be remembered. Not every note in the scale is equal. When looked at on an individual basis, some notes are more dissonant than others. Let's look at a C major scale played over a C major chord from an improviser's point of view. To make it interesting let's draw an analogy. We will say that each note of the scale has votes and that the more influential or important notes have more votes than the weaker ones. (Example 18)

Example 18

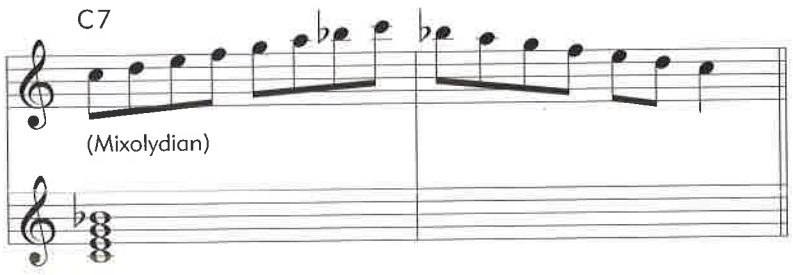


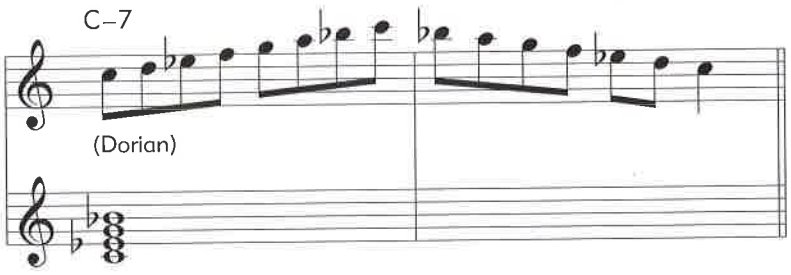
I (tonic)	C	This note has many votes if you are a bass player but **only one or two votes** if you are improvising. It is not colorful enough.
II (ninth)	D	An excellent note choice if you want color, but for expressing the underlying harmony, it **gets few votes.**
III (third)	E	**Many votes!** This note defines the chord by telling us its quality (in this case major).
IV (fourth)	F	**No votes!!** This is the weakest note in the entire scale. It sounds wrong" when sustained against the chord. It needs to resolve (often down to the third).
V (fifth)	G	**Some votes.** It is not as colorful as the sixth or ninth. It is usually the first note to be omitted in a voicing, since it has no effect in defining the chord.
VI (sixth)	A	**Some votes.** It is a colorful note choice, but it does not express the harmony or function of the chord.
VII (seventh)	B	**Many votes.** This note tells us if the chord wants to move to another chord or stay where it is. In this case it wants to stay where it is. If it was B♭, it would want to move.

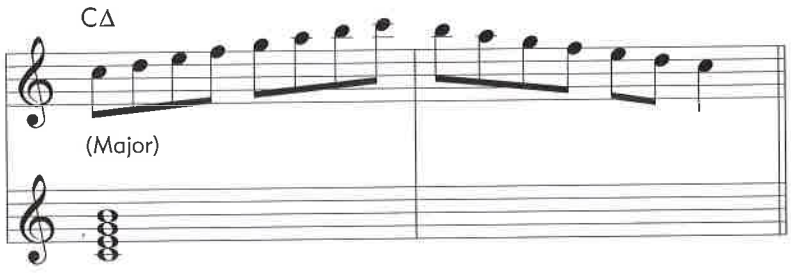
From this information you should realize that when matching scales with chords, the thirds and sevenths must be compatible. This is why a major scale does not sound good when played over a minor seventh chord. Two important notes clash – the third and the seventh.

Assignments:

1. At the piano, practice your scales by playing the chord in your left hand, and the corresponding related scale in your right.
2. Transpose the following example to all keys.







SCALE PRACTICE

Scale practice provides the perfect place for you to practice time and articulation. Start with a five note pattern. Put the metronome on 2 and 4 and use the "jazz" articulation as previously discussed. (Example 37) [CD, Track 16]

Example 37

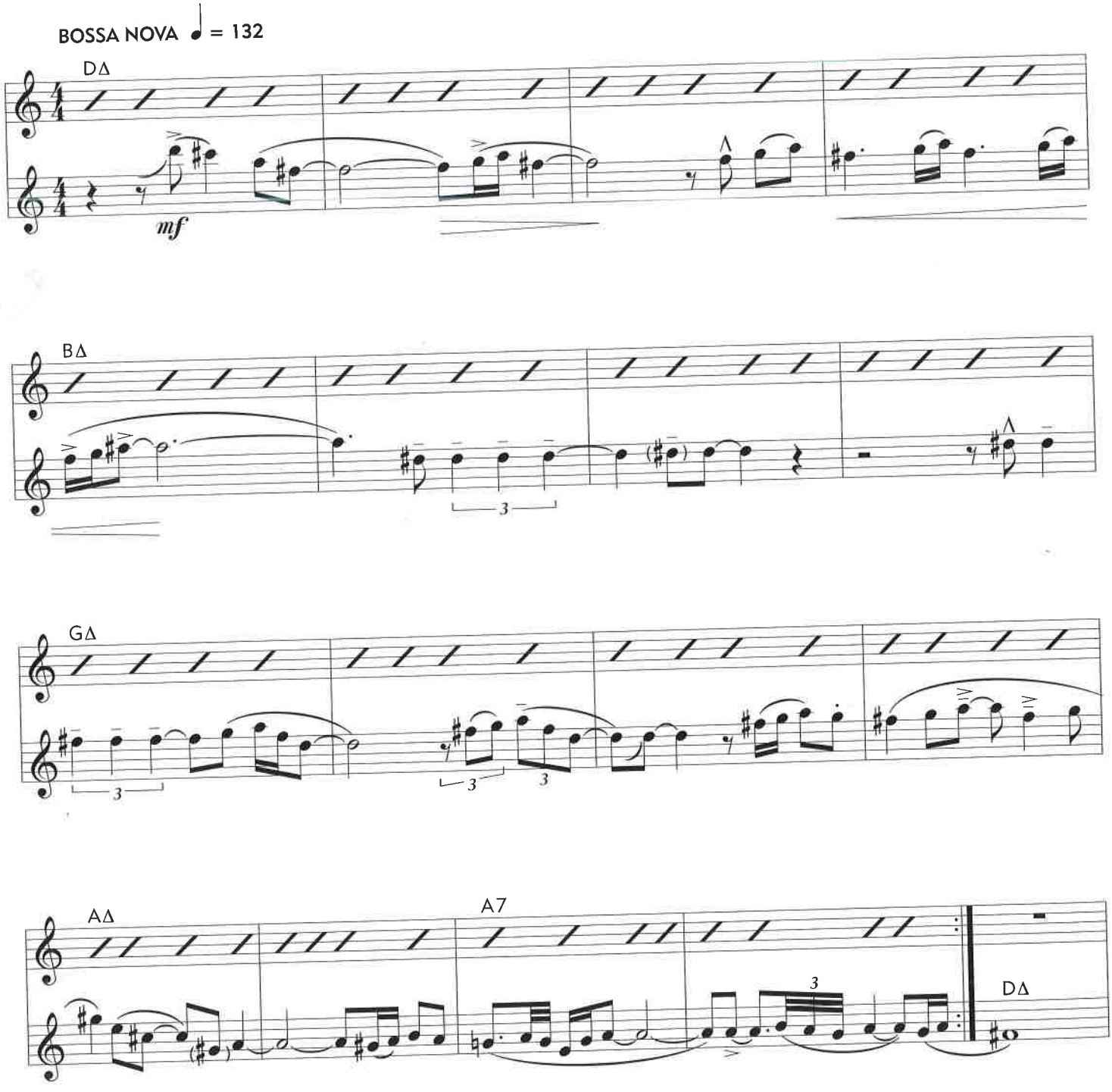
Expand this exercise to one octave. Go up to the ninth to make this scale sound more musical. (Example 38) [CD, Track 17]

Example 38

Finally, take the scales two octaves. (Example 39)

Example 39

Assignments:

1. Practice your scales with "jazz" articulation.
2. Use your metronome by having it click on beats two and four.
3. Keep yourself challenged by increasing the tempo.

Track 27 Major Seventh Chords