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HOW TO PRACTICE MELODIC MINOR SCALES WITH PASSING TONES

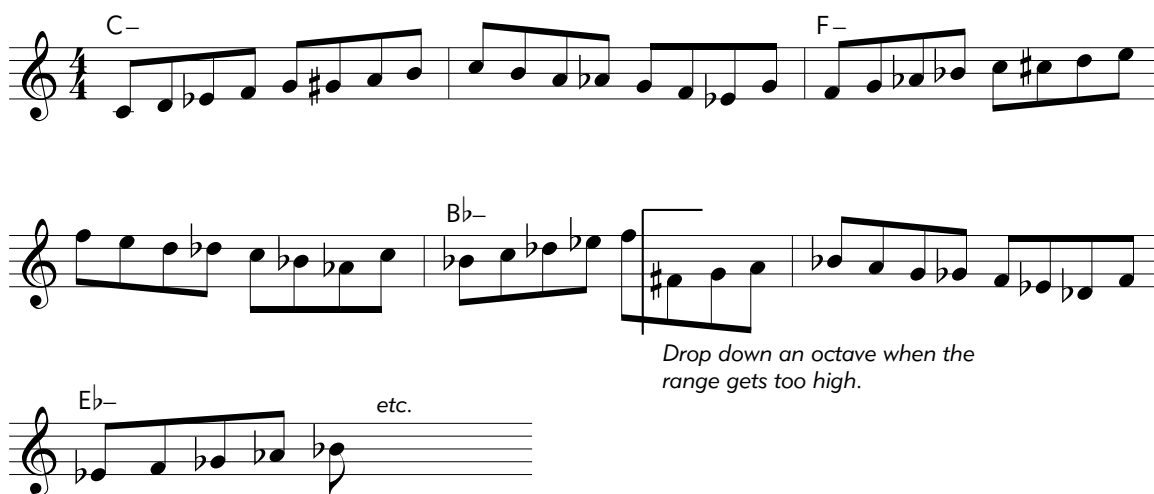
Stage 1: Practice individual scales

- The first step is to learn the scales one or two octaves (depending on your instrument and your range on it). Set the metronome at a playable tempo clicking on beats 2 and 4 and begin. As you become more comfortable increase the tempo.
- Select a scale and practice its different starting points, (root, third, fifth and sixth). This will reinforce the fingerings and help get the sound of the scale in your ear.
- Practice all the scales beginning on the third. Take them around the circle. Next, do all the scales starting on the fifth, then finally the sixth.

Stage 2: Put it all together

- It is extremely useful to practice not only individual scales but also to practice possible resolutions. After all, that is what you must do when you improvise.
- When chaining the scales together, concentrate on the resolution.
- Select a target note (the root, third, fifth or sixth of the chord) to which you are going, and practice resolving smoothly and musically.
-  Make up some rules for yourself. Here is an example. “I am going to play the melodic minor scales with passing tones. The chords will resolve around the circle of fourths and will move at a rate of one every two measures. I am going to arrive on the root of each chord by playing a whole-step under and a whole-step over the target note.” **(Track 3)**

Example 10 - Chaining melodic minor scales with passing tones around the circle (Track 3)



Drop down an octave when the range gets too high.

The following example gives eight ways to practice the melodic minor scale with a passing tone around the circle of fourths. Remember the target note principle. You can approach the target note in a variety of ways. Example 11c, e, g use notes from the scale. 11a uses a whole-step over, 11d uses a half-step under, and 11b, f and h uses a half-step over.

Example 11 - Eight ways to practice resolving melodic minor scales with passing tones around the circle of fourths

The image displays eight musical examples, labeled A through H, each in 4/4 time and using a treble clef. Each example shows a melodic minor scale starting on C (C-), moving up to F (F-), and then resolving. The examples illustrate various ways to approach the target note F- using passing tones from the circle of fourths. Examples A, C, E, G, and H use notes from the scale, while B, D, F, and H use notes from the circle of fourths (F, C, G, D, A, E).

A: C- (C4) → D4 (passing tone) → E4 (passing tone) → F- (F4) etc.

B: C- (C4) → D4 (passing tone) → E4 (passing tone) → F- (F4) etc.

C: C- (C4) → D4 (passing tone) → E4 (passing tone) → F- (F4) etc.

D: C- (C4) → D4 (passing tone) → E4 (passing tone) → F- (F4) etc.

E: C- (C4) → D4 (passing tone) → E4 (passing tone) → F- (F4) etc.

F: C- (C4) → D4 (passing tone) → E4 (passing tone) → F- (F4) etc.

G: C- (C4) → D4 (passing tone) → E4 (passing tone) → F- (F4) etc.

H: C- (C4) → D4 (passing tone) → E4 (passing tone) → F- (F4) etc.

Assignment:

Using the target note principle, devise your own resolutions and chain these scales together by descending or ascending in half-steps.

APPLICATION OF MELODIC MINOR SCALES TO VARIOUS CHORD TYPES

Mastery of the melodic minor scale can help you simplify harmonic progressions that may at first seem difficult. Example 12 gives several different ways to harmonize the C melodic minor scale.

Example 12 - C melodic minor scale harmonized

C-Δ, Aø, B7#5#9, F13(#11), EbΔ#5, D13sus^{b9}, G7sus

The image shows a single staff of music in treble clef. Above the staff, the following chords are listed: C-Δ, Aø, B7#5#9, F13(#11), EbΔ#5, D13sus^{b9}, and G7sus. Below the staff, the notes of the C melodic minor scale are written as half notes: C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4.

The chords in Example 12 at first glance look dissimilar, but in reality the opposite is true. They are actually all very closely related. Look at Example 13 and note the number of common notes present in these different chords. Each chord used in this example is a possible choice to harmonize a melody that is in C melodic minor. Thinking the other way – C melodic minor is a scale that works well over each of these chords.

Example 13 - Chords of Example 12

C-Δ, A^o7, B7#5#9, D13sus^{b9}, EbΔ#5, F13#11, G7sus

The image shows a single staff of music in treble clef with a 4/4 time signature. Seven chords are shown as block chords in the first measure of each bar: C-Δ, A^o7, B7#5#9, D13sus^{b9}, EbΔ#5, F13#11, and G7sus. The notes for each chord are written as whole notes.

APPLYING MELODIC MINOR SCALES WITH PASSING TONES TO MINOR II-V-I PROGRESSIONS

The next step is to add the passing tone between notes 5 and 6 and to start the scale on the root, third, fifth and sixth scale degrees. Example 23 gives eight different ways to practice the melodic minor scale with a passing tone in a minor II-V-I context. Practice these patterns in all keys. Use Track 15 of the accompanying CD as a play-along accompaniment.

When practicing, the concept is the same as previously discussed.

- Use the melodic minor scale with passing tone over the half-diminished, altered dominant and minor chords.
- Target the root, third, fifth or sixth of each chord.
- Resolve smoothly to the target note.

Example 23 - Eight ways to practice the melodic minor with a passing tone scale over the minor II-V-I Progression

Bø
D melodic minor scale

E7alt.
F melodic minor scale

A-
A melodic minor scale

A

B
root

(1/2 step under)

C
3rd

D
5th

E
6th

6th

5th

3rd

Bø
D melodic minor scale

E7alt.
F melodic minor scale

A-
A melodic minor scale

A

B
root

(omit the 1/2 step)

C
3rd

D
5th

E
6th

6th

5th

3rd

Example 25 - Chord progression from movement II of SONATA FOR SAXOPHONE AND PIANO by Bill Dobbins

The musical score consists of six staves. The first staff (measures 1-4) shows a saxophone melody starting with a *mf* dynamic, moving to *p* and then *mp*. The second staff (measures 5-8) features a piano accompaniment with a *mf* to *f* dynamic range and includes chords: $Bb-11^b5$, $Eb7^{\#5\#9}$, $D\Delta^{\#11}$, and $C^{\#7^{\#5\#9}}$. The third staff (measures 9-12) contains chords: $F^{\#-11^b5}$, $B7^{\#5\#9}$, $D^{\#7/E}$, $E7^{\#5\#9}$, $A-11^b5$, $D7^{\#5\#9}$, $C^{\#}\Delta^{\#11}$, and $C7^{\#5\#9}$. The fourth staff (measures 13-16) contains chords: $F-11^b5$, $Bb7^{\#5\#9}$, $Bb-7/Eb$, $Eb7^{\#5\#9}$, $D-11^b5$, $G7^b5b9$, $C\Delta^{\#5}$, $B\emptyset$, and $E7^{\#5\#9}$. The fifth staff (measures 17-20) contains chords: $Eb\Delta/A$, $A13^{\#11}$, $Ab\Delta^{\#5}$, $E7^{\#5\#9}$, $A\Delta^9$, $F7^{\#5\#9}$, $Bb\Delta^{\#5}$, and $A7^{\#5\#9}$. The sixth staff (measures 21-24) contains chords: $Ab\Delta^{\#5}/D$, $G7^{\#5\#9}$, and $F^{\#7^{\#5\#9}}$.

Together with Bill Dobbins I recorded his *Saxophone Sonata* for Albany Records on a CD entitled *Jazz Sonata*. Example 26 is a transcription of my improvised solo in the second movement of this work. In it you can see that, along with diminished material, the melodic minor was used quite often. It should be noted, however, that there was not a conscious effort to use melodic minor sounds. This analysis came several years after the solo was recorded.