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Home > Scales > Jazz Scales This lesson will show you some of the most commonly used jazz guitar scales, although keep in mind you shouldn't necessarily be limited to using these scales. Jazz is an experimental genre and guitarists are constantly exploring new scales (and modifying old ones) in their improvisation. Each scale below is shown in its first position box pattern, but you can learn how to "unbox" these scales in their individual lessons. I'll also note the associated chord type for each scale so you have some idea of when to use them. Remember, learning scales is just one part of jazz guitar, but it is a crucial part, as a lot of your playing time will be spent on lead improvisation. For now, just get to know the basic interval structure and color of these scales. Each one offers its own unique sound... Download the free print sheets for this lesson (PDF) These are your standard improvisation scales over major, minor and diminished chords. In the diagrams below, take a look at how the intervals correspond with those in the associated chord. For example, Lydian is suited to maj7#11 chords because of its #4 (augmented 4th) interval (4 is technically the same as 11 in music theory). Looking for chord backing tracks to practice these scales over? I recommend this (free) Chord Generator. Select the appropriate chord type from the drop down menu. Play over: Major 7th chords (e.g. C Major over Cmaj7) Characterised by the major 7th (7) added to the major triad (1, 3, 5). Play over: Major 7th (Sharp 11th) chords (e.g. C Lydian over Cmaj7 or Cmaj7#11) The #4 (#11) gives Lydian its distinctive flavour over major 7th chords (1, 3, 5, 7). Play over: Dominant 7th chords (e.g. C Mixolydian over C7) The basic dominant scale (1, 3, 5, b7). Play over: Minor 7th / Minor 6th chords (e.g. C Dorian over Cm7 / Cm6) Characterised by its major 6th (6) over minor 7th chords (1, b3, 5, b7). Play over: Half Diminished chords (e.g. C Locrian over Cm7b5) The melodic minor scale also has its own modal system, producing 7 of its own modes/scales, each one rooted on a degree of the scale. These derived scales have qualities that are well suited to those tense, altered jazz chords. Notice how the names of some of these scales refer to modes of the major scale (e.g. Dorian, Mixolydian) but with slight alterations (e.g. Dorian b2) that make significant differences to the scale's overall sound... Play over: Minor Major 7th / Minor 6th chords (e.g. C Melodic Minor over CmM7 / Cm6) Same as Dorian, but with a major 7th instead of a minor 7th. Often called the "jazz minor scale". Play over: Suspended 4th, Flat 9th chords (e.g. C Dorian b2 over C7sus4/b9) Dorian with a minor 2nd. Generally used as an alternative to Phrygian minor. Play over: Major 7th, Augmented 5th chords (e.g. C Lydian Augmented over Cmaj7#5) Lydian with an augmented 5th. Play over: Dominant 7th, Sharp 11th chords (e.g. C Lydian Dominant over C7 or C7#11) A nice (and often preferable) alternative to Mixolydian, the only difference between the two being the 4th. Play over: Dominant 7th, Flat 13th chords (e.g. C Mixolydian b6 over C7 or C7b13) Remember the 13th is the same as the 6th, so we're looking for a flat 6th (b6) interval over flat 13th chords. But it's also just another option for coloring dominant 7th chords with no extensions. Play over: Half Diminished chords (e.g. C Half Diminished over Cm7b5) The only difference between this scale and the other natural half diminished scale, Locrian, is the major 2nd instead of the minor 2nd. Play over: Augmented 7th or Dominant 7th, Sharp 9th, Flat 13th chords (e.g. C Altered over C7#9b13 or Caug7) So-called because it colors the "altered" extensions of the #9 (#2) and b13 (b6) in dominant 7th chords. The minor and major pentatonic scales play a significant role in jazz. Minor pentatonic can be used over minor chords and certain minor key progressions. But it can also be positioned relative to major chords to outline specific chord tones. For example, you can start the following minor pentatonic pattern on the major 3rd of a major 7th chord to outline the maj7 chord tones (e.g. play E minor pentatonic over Cmaj7). Major pentatonic can be used in a similar way. For example, as well as using it over maj7 and dom7 chords, you could also start it on the 2nd degree of a maj7 chord to highlight the 9, #11, 13 and 7 tones respectively (e.g. D major pentatonic over Cmaj7). Adding a flat 5th (b5) and major 7th (7) to minor pentatonic gives us a jazzier variation on the standard blues scale... You can also add an extra tone to major pentatonic to give it more of a jazzy/bluesy flavour. Essentially, we're adding a chromatic minor 3rd to major pentatonic. In the context of a major key progression (e.g. I IV V), the minor 3rd will often resolve quickly down to the 2nd or up to the major 3rd... In jazz, combinations of major and minor pentatonic blues scales will commonly be used in the same lead passages. Bebop scales add chromatic "passing tones" to standard 7 note scales. You'll also often hear the bass following these chromatic passages. Passing tones should be glanced over rather than emphasised/held. See them as part of the path or bridge between the starting and destination notes of a phrase. Holding the major 3rd over a minor chord, for example, will sound dissonant, but if you pass over it quickly, as part of a larger phrase, it'll fall into context. This chromatic phrasing is a large part of jazz's distinctive sound. Play over: Major 7th chords Ionian with a passing flat 5th. Play over: Dominant 7th chords Mixolydian with a passing major 7th. Play over: Minor 7th and minor 6th chords Dorian with a passing major 3rd. Remember, this is a minor scale used in a minor context, so don't dwell on the major 3rd. Use it as a passing tone... The whole tone scale is so-called because it consists entirely of whole step intervals. It's used to colour augmented 7th chords (e.g. Caug7 / C7#5)... This is an eight note (octatonic) scale that works over diminished 7th (e.g. Cdim7) chords. It's characterised by its repetitive interval step pattern (W H W H W H W H)... I hope you found this lesson useful! Was this helpful? Share this with your fellow guitar enthusiasts... Please support this site. I really appreciate it! Stay updated and learn more Enter your email below for more like this and grab your free Uncommon Chords book... Share your thoughts... Have any questions, thoughts or ideas about this lesson? Let us know using the comments form below. ^ Back to Top Related Learn More Guitar Scales Bebop scales are usually played in bebop. Contrary to the heptatonic scales (seven pitches per octave) they contain eight notes (octatonic scales) including chromaticisms (chromatic passing tones). They are derived for the most of them from modes of the major scale but also from the harmonic minor and melodic minor scales. Notice that there isn't just one Bebop Scale, but a lot of them. What we call «BeBop Scales» is a concept and not a particular scale. The principle of bebop concept is to insert an extra note (passing tone), into an existing scale/mode as major, dominant, Dorian, etc. thus giving a lot of possibilities. The bebop scales presented in this website represent the most popular, don't hesitate to built your own. Bebop Scales From The Diatonic Major Scale : Formula is 1-2-3-4-5-#5-6-7. This is the major scale including a passing tone (#5) between the fifth and the sixth. Formula is 1-2-b3-3-4-5-6-b7. Compared to the Dorian mode this scale has an additional note, a major third, between the minor third (b3) and the fourth. The dominant bebop scale : Formula is 1-2-3-4-5-6-b7-7. This is the Mixolydian mode including a major seventh. The Locrian bebop scale : Formula is 1-b2-b3-4-b5-5-b6-b7. It has an additional fifth between the flat fifth (b5) and the minor sixth (b6). The Phrygian dominant bebop scale : Formula is 1-b2-3-4-5-b6-b7-7. This scale (also referred to as Altered Bebop) is derived from the fifth mode of the harmonic scale, the Phrygian dominant mode. Other Bebop Scales The harmonic minor bebop scale : Formula is : 1-2-b3-4-5-b6-b7-7. This scale has a chromatic passing tone (b7) between the minor sixth (b6) and the major seventh (7). The melodic minor bebop scale is derived from the ascending form of the melodic minor scale, it has a chromatic passing tone between the 5th and 6th notes. Like the term "jazz scales", bebop scales are more than just one scale. They are a common group of note sequences used in jazz and fusion. In this article we will discuss what makes a bebop scale and the different formulas, along with the best times and chord progression to play them in.What is a bebop?The Bebop Era began around the 1940's, during this time Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Lester Young, and many more helped innovate a new style of jazz. This new genre was known for being complicated. Lots of key changes, hard chord progressions, complex harmonies, and incredible improvisation.This was almost a rebellion from standard jazz and popular music chord progressions with normal and simple verse-chorus repetition. The point was to be radical. This was when the Beat Generation began, and their Bohemian lifestyle mixed perfectly with the impulsive and uncertainty of bebop. Just like life, who knows what the next note will be!Because of its odd intervals and constant changes, the music became more of a cult phenomenon as the masses didn't quite take to the musical complexity. But bebop lives on in the heart of every jazz player looking for that next unexpected, but incredible note to be played. Many fusion guitarists are especially familiar with these scales.What is the bebop scale?First let's look at the simple hexatonic (6 note) blues scale.In the key of C that is C Eb F Gb G Bb and back to C again. Play this scale and it is no doubt bluesy. Why? The chromatic movement of that b3 to 4 to #4 along with the b7 makes for some very jazz quality vibes. And jazz musicians love chromatically playing through notes!And that is the main glue and source of all the bebop scales below. We simply take regular scales and modes and add notes so there are more chromatic intervals.Depending on where we make these changes, will determine the quality of that particular bebop scale:Most bebop scales are named after what scale they are making changes to, which is mostly the addition of one extra chromatic note, so they are often 8 note scales.In general, we will be playing bebop scales over the normal jazz progression of ii-V-I, except moving through many keys. But it is not as if they can't be used in other or similar progressions. Either way the more major and dominant bebop scales can be used with those types of chords, while the minor scales will clearly sound better with the minor chord sections.In the following, we're going to learn the most common Bebop scales, with the help of fretboard diagrams in the key of C. Of course, you can shift the shapes up or down the neck to play with another root.Bebop MajorThis is just the major or Ionian scale with a raised fifth as a passing tone. Since it is built off a major 6th and diminished 7th, these are two chords this scale will work great with.Note: All the diagrams on this page are taken from my complete ebook Scales Over Chords.Bebop DominantThe dominant bebop scale is simply the mixolydian scale with an added 7. We bring that major quality back into the mix. This scale is often played over dominant 7th chords and its extensions.Bebop DorianHere we have an added 3rd to a normal Dorian scale, giving it a minor bluesy feel. This is because it also has the same mixolydian notes of the root note to play. A double dose of funky blues for some guitarists.Bebop Melodic MinorThis scale is just the melodic minor with a passing #5 added. It is great with minor 6th chords, or it can even be mixed in with some harmonic minor.Bebop Harmonic MinorBy adding a natural 7th, we get a mix of an Aeolian and harmonic minor scale. These specific tones allow it to be used over all three chords of the ii-V-I.Bebop Whole ToneThis is the whole tone scale with added 4th and 7th.Bebop LocrianAs if the Locrian scale isn't weird enough here, we add a natural 5th. It actually almost sounds better than regular Locrian! This will be an interesting scale to attempt to fit over the ii chord in the ii-V-I.Bebop Phrygian DominantHere we add a 7th to the basic Phrygian dominant scale. While the ii-V-I is the most common you will also be playing progressions like I-VI-ii-V. And when the VI is a VI7b9 this is the scale used.These are the most common bebop scales you will see, but you can change other scales in this chromatic method to get similar results. And you will eventually notice some of the same scales have different names.Playing bebop scalesWith a normal diatonic 7 note scale we have trouble fitting that into rhythms, especially in 4/4 time. But with an 8 note bebop scale we can have each note on a step.We play the important chord tones on the downbeat, and the remaining tones on the upbeat. This always keeps the song grounded like our ears prefer, while you improvise the new chromatic notes.This is one reason bebop scales are for guitarists with a little more drive as these scales are complicated at times and have to be played on the right beats. And you really want to know all your keys as you never know what you will be improvising over.We mention possible chords above to play over, but experimentation is key.But there is a bright side to all the extra practice and knowledge. Because of the added chromatic or passing notes, bebop scales will help you a lot more with melodies rather than harmonies. Which is why they are so perfect for improvisation; they allow you to break out of the mold of the normal scale and its expected interval sounds.When it comes to practicing your bebop scales you stick to your first basic exercises and then just jump into trying them out. Use backing jazz tracks to play your own 8 note scales with chromatic parts, focus on the down and upbeat, and most of all let go of all the reasons and rules and just let your emotion take over.Bebop isn't about mechanics or replication, but raw inspiration.And music inspires a lot of passion in players and listeners. As Jack Kerouac wrote in the famous American novel On the Road:"Out we jumped in the warm, mad night, hearing a wild tenorman's bawling horns across the way going, ee-yah(ph), ee-ya, and hands clapping to the beat and folks yelling go, go, go. And far from escorting the girls into the place, Dean Moriarty was already racing across the street with his huge bandit's thumb in the air yelling, blow, man, blow".That's all for today. For more scale pattern with root on all string, check my complete ebook Scales Over Chords, in which you'll also learn which scales to play over any chord.Subscribe here to stay updated



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