Jazz Guitar ONLINE

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Lessons ONLINE

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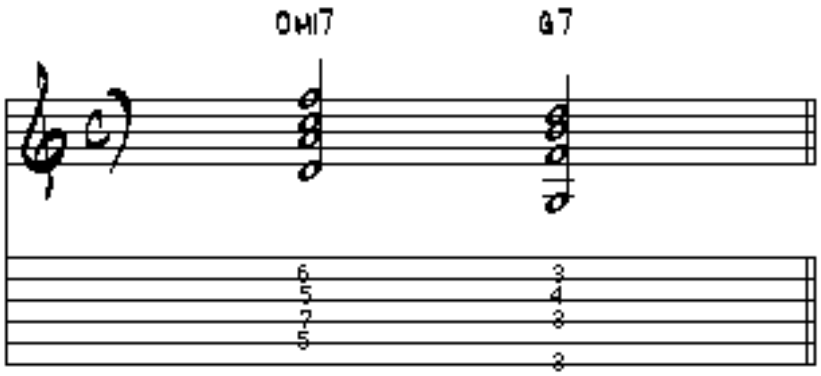
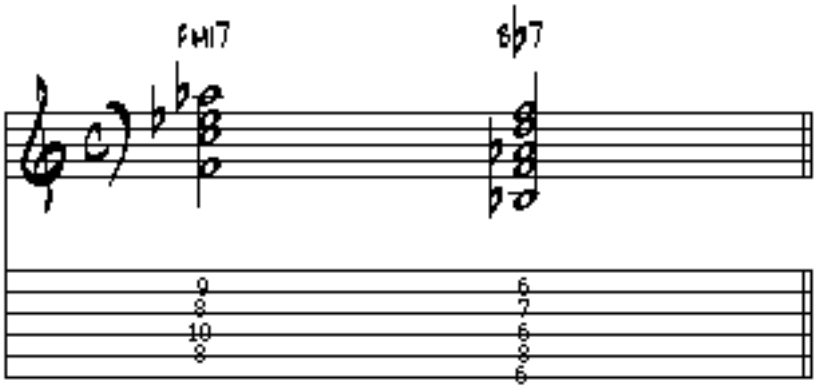
Lesson 1: The ii-V Progression

What it is

This is the most common chord progression in Jazz music. Knowing how to solo over it will be the most useful skill you can have as a jazz guitarist. First, let's look at the progression itself. In the key of C, a ii-V would be composed of the following chords: **Dmi7** and **G7**.



Typically, this is followed by the I, which in this case is **Cmaj7**. (Notice that in jazz, the 7 is automatically added to virtually every chord.) Both the ii chord and the V chord are organic to the original key; that is, you don't have to add any accidentals to create the chords. Let's change keys and see what a ii-V would be in Eb:

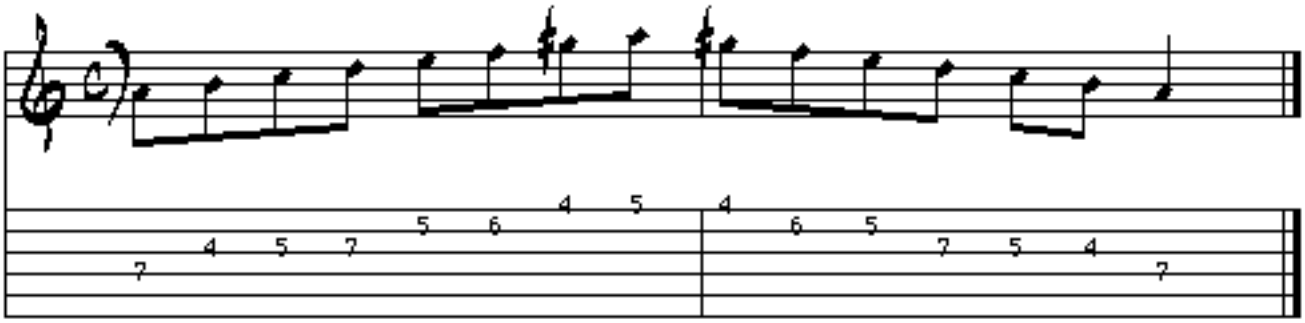


Hopefully, that will show you what a ii-V progression is. Anytime you see a minor 7 chord followed by a dominant7 chord whose root is a fourth higher, it is a ii-V. The chords themselves can also have added tones, like **Dmi9-G13**.

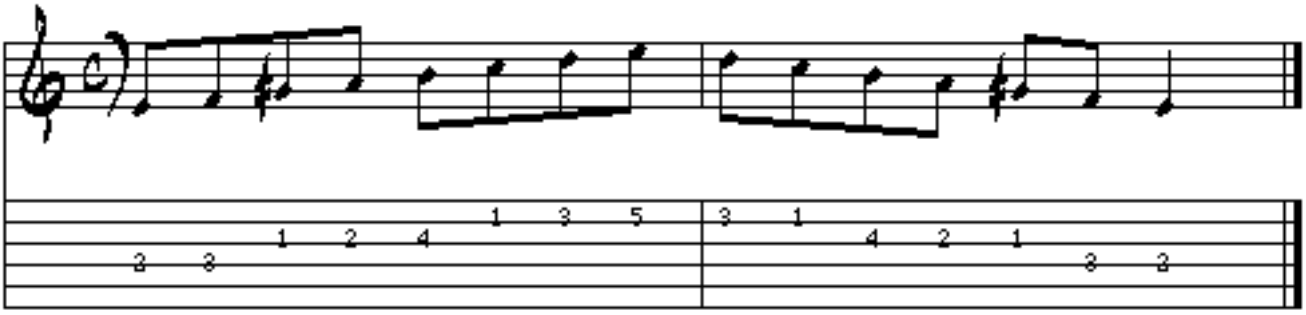
Lesson 2: The Harmonic Minor Scale

The Harmonic Minor scale is one of more limited usefulness than the Major scale, but it yields some interesting possibilities. Let's see how this scale is constructed: If we have A harmonic minor, the pitches are A, B, C, D, E, F, G#, A. There are two ways of describing this scale.

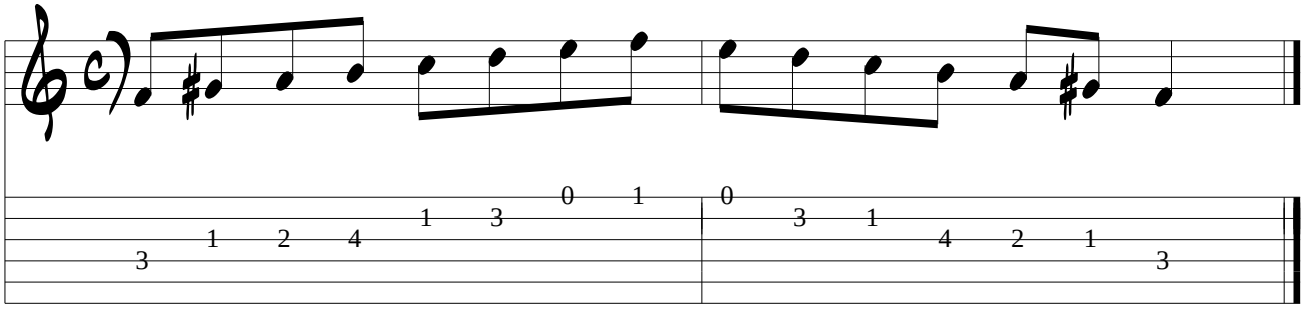
Natural minor with a raised 7th
Major with flat 3rd and flat 6th



If we look at this scale according to the first example, we see something useful. The raised 7th is known as a "leading tone" because it leads your ear up to the tonic. If you know your theory, you know that the chord that contains the leading tone is the V. What is the V7 chord of A minor? E7 is. What if we took this harmonic minor and used it over a E7? To experiment, we will start the A har. min. on a E:



That gave us the 1, 3, 5, 7, b9, 11, b13. Wow, those are colorful notes. Seems that if you're in A minor and hit a E7 of some kind, the A Harmonic Minor scale gives you an interesting option. Here's another even less common usage: Start the scale on the F. What do we get then?

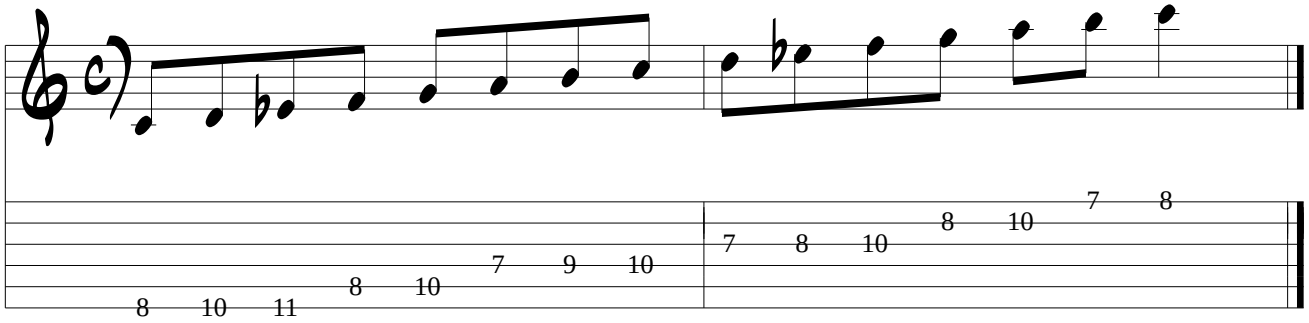


Over an F major chord, we would have 1, 3, 5, 7, #9, #11, 13. How's that for an unorthodox sound? I also see some interesting triads in that scale, like C augmented.

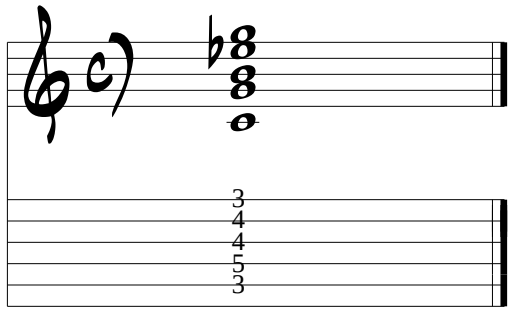
The key to getting these sounds in your ear is rote repitition. If you can "hear" it, it becomes easier to incorporate into your playing. Try it out yourself. Now get up from the computer and GO PRACTICE!

Lesson 3: The Melodic Minor Scale

The melodic minor scale (also called the Jazz Minor) is a very useful one in jazz playing. Like the major scale, this scale spawns a host of modes that work with a variety of different chords. The scale itself is identical to a regular minor scale EXCEPT for the raised 6th and 7th degrees (You could also think of this scale as a major scale with a flatted 3rd). In classical theory, this is called the Ascending melodic minor, while the Descending scale is identical to the natural minor. This distinction is useless in jazz, so we will consider the ascending and descending scales to be the same. Here is the scale in C minor:



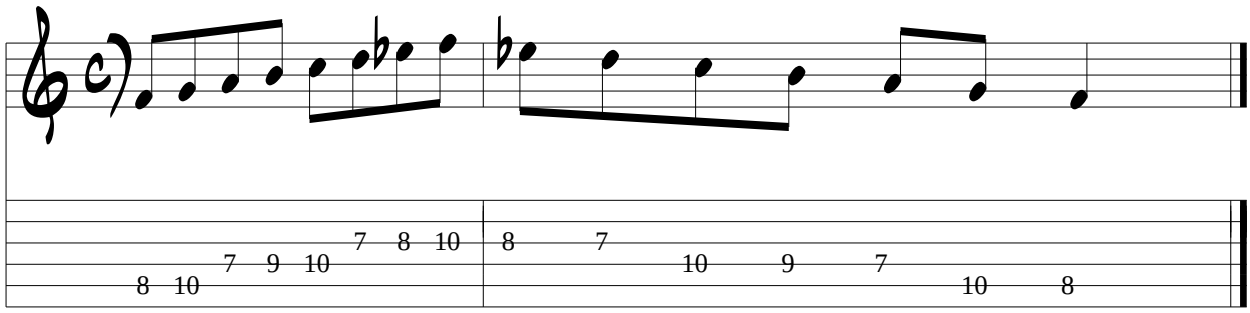
Used by itself, the scale can be used over a Minor(maj7) chord. The chord is spelled: **1, b3, 5, 7**. Like this:



If you want to hear this chord in a tune, the best one would be Horace Silver's **Nica's Dream**. The scale is also useful over augmented sounds, i.e., C melodic minor over B7aug. As for the modes of the melodic minor, I'll just discuss two of them.

Mode 4: Lydian b7

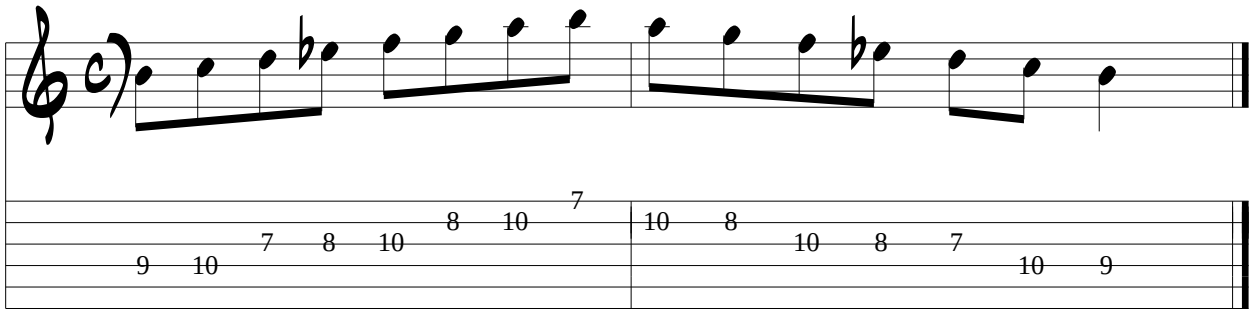
The Lydian b7, or Lydian Dominant, starts on the 4th degree of the melodic minor scale. In our case, it would look like this:



This mode is most useful over the 9(b5) or 9(#11) chord. An F9(#11) is spelled F, A, C, Eb, G, Cb. It has an interesting sound. The most famous use of this chord is in bars 3 and 4 of **Take the "A" Train**, by Billy Strayhorn.

Mode 7: Diminished/Wholetone

This mode has several names: altered, altered dominant, etc. I pick this name because I think it is the most accurate description of this scale. A Bdim/wt mode would look like this:



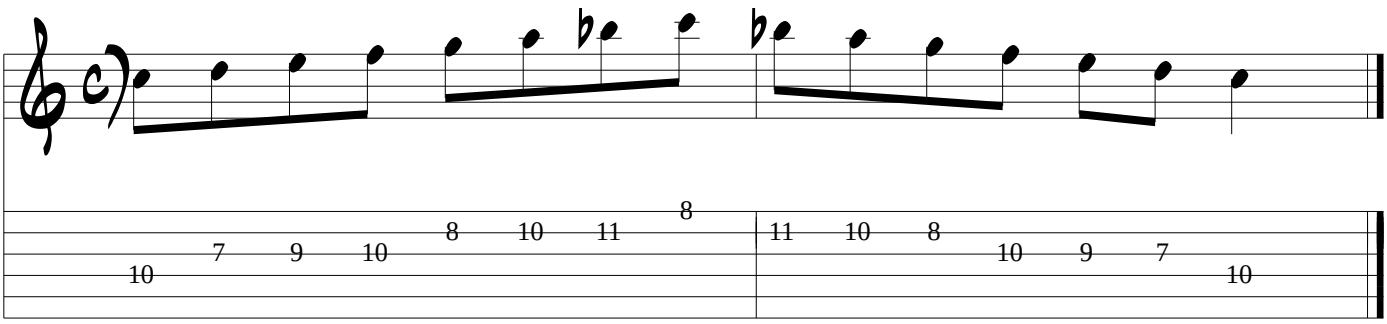
This mode can be used over almost any type of altered chord. In this case it could be: B7#9, B7(#5b9), etc. This sound is most useful in a ii-V progression in a minor key (remember Lesson 1?).

As you have seen, the Melodic Minor is a very versatile scale. This is one to spend a lot of time on. See you next week!

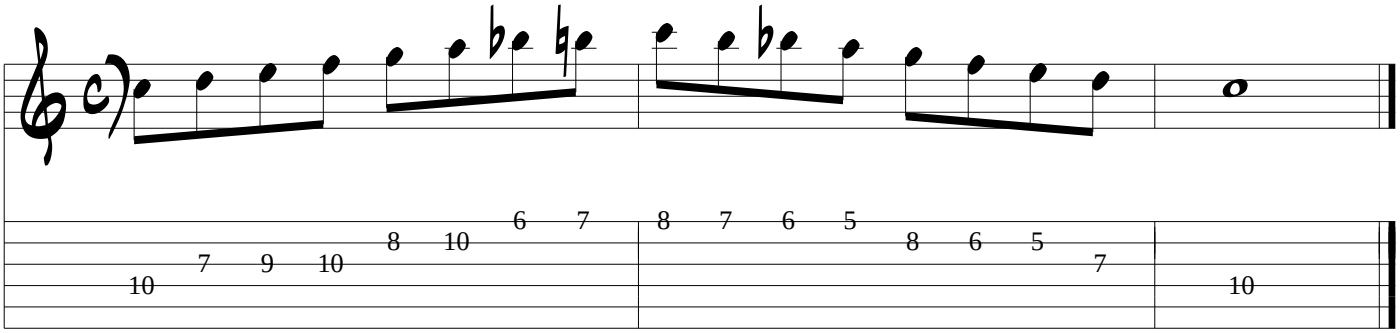
Lesson 4: The Bebop Dominant Scale

The innovations of Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie in the 1940s changed jazz forever. These two guys codified how the language should be spoken. This scale is one result of their efforts. This particular term for the scale was coined by David Baker, so I use it myself.

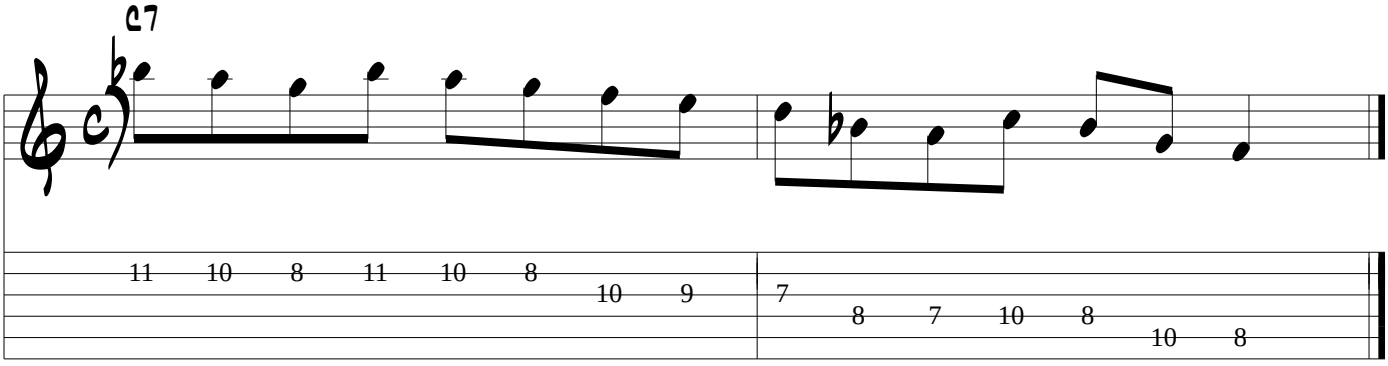
The Bebop Dominant Scale is basically a Mixolydian mode with an extra note — a natural 7th. Here is the basic C Mixolydian mode:



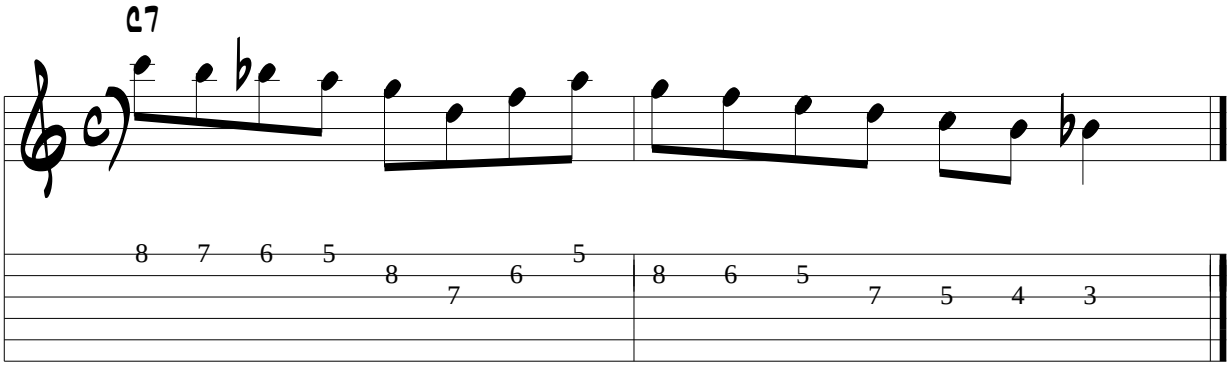
The Bebop Dominant has the extra natural 7th, like so:



This added note does two things: 1) Provides a smooth descending leading tone, 2) gives the scale 8 notes. Item 1 is immediately obvious. Item 2 is not apparent until you start soloing with the scale. What the 8 notes do is give you the ability to play **chord tones on all downbeats**. This is important; it is the most effective way to get long phrases. For example, check out this standard Mixolydian lick:



Notice how the last half starts to sound awkward. You don't have chord tones on downbeats. Look at this bebop lick:

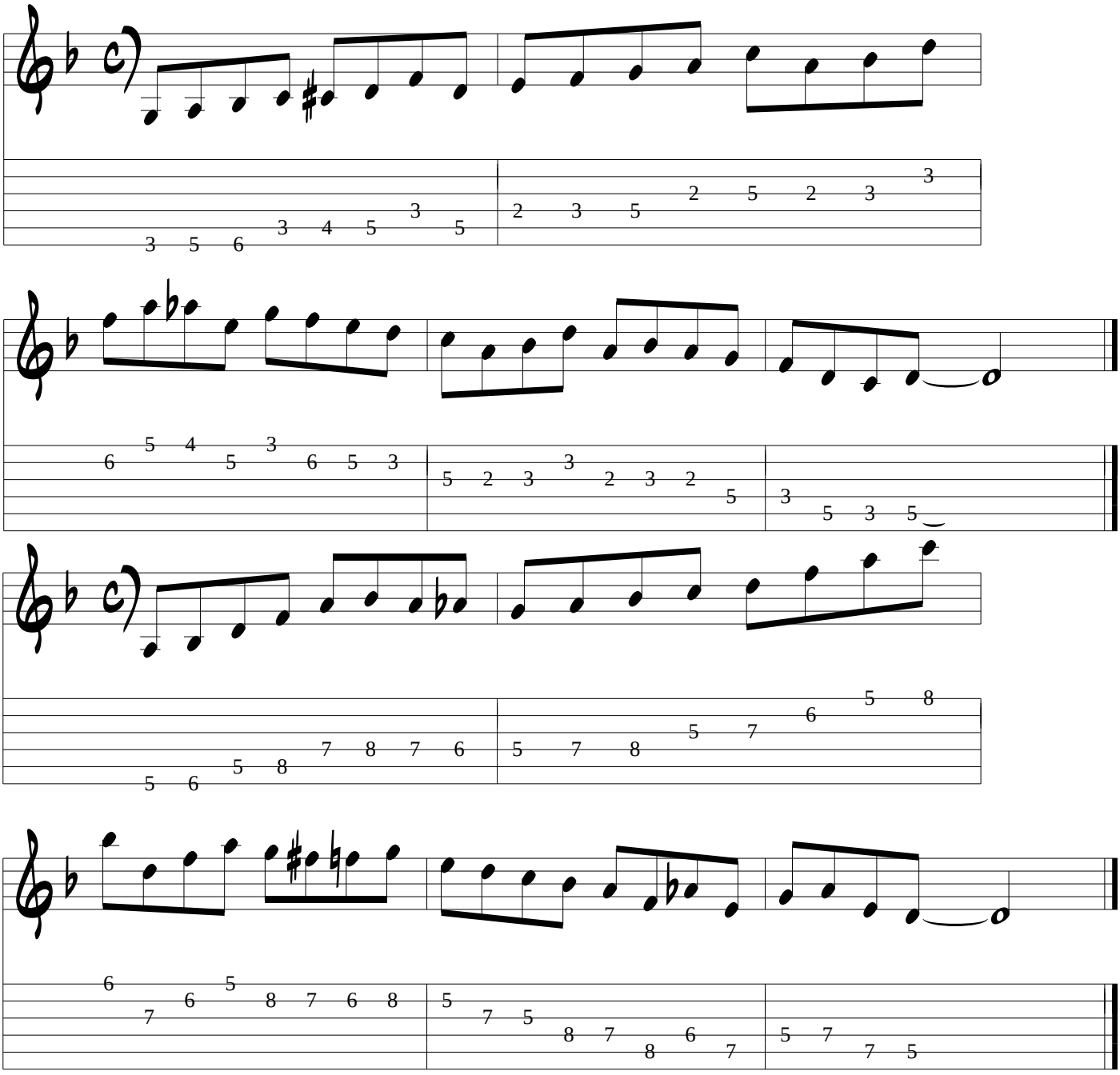


Do you hear it? It just wants to keep going. That's how those guys like Parker, Gillespie, Adderley, etc. could get those endless lines. Even Pat Martino uses this technique. Remember this however: Use the added 7th ONLY when descending. Skip it when you ascend. And KEEP THE CHORDTONES ON DOWNBEATS! By the way, I highly recommend **David Baker's** 3 volume set on how to play Bebop.

This little device can revolutionize your playing if you take time with it. It can change how you view improvisation. I am not kidding. **The Bebop technique is one of the secrets of the masters.** Take this one home and lock yourself in a room for a week. Experiment. Make your own licks. Create lines. Then, go get a gig!

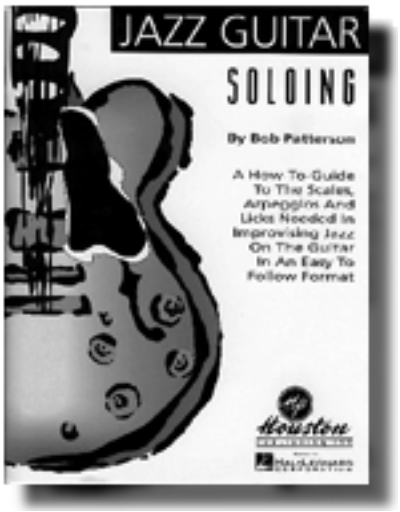
Lesson 5: Bebop lines over the Minor 7 Chord

Just as you can use them over their native Dominant 7 chord, Bebop scales can also be used over a Minor 7 chord whose root is a 4th below the root of the scale. In other words, anything that works over C7 will work over Gmin7. For your further practicing enjoyment, here are some minor licks in the Bebop style that I came across some years ago. They have a Pat Martino-ish sound to them. Enjoy!



Hope you liked those. You should transpose them in all keys so you can use them whenever the need arises.

Jazz Guitar Soloing



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