

Advanced Harmony: Jazz Minor Application

by Rod Goelz

The Jazz Minor Scale is one of the most versatile AND overlooked scales in jazz. This lesson was created to make clear how the Jazz Minor Scale may be used in improvisation. I will expose two different modern ways to employ the Jazz Minor in everyday Jazz.

What is a Jazz Minor Scale? Notewise, it's identical to the ascending Melodic Minor Scale found in traditional harmony. If you'll remember in your traditional harmony classes, the Melodic Minor reverts to the parallel Natural Minor when it descends. This is not the case with the Jazz Minor Scale. The Jazz Minor ascends AND descends using the same set of notes. Structurally, think of the Jazz Minor Scale as a Natural Minor Scale with the 6th and 7th intervals raised one half step. We use the scale to play over a variety of chord sounds: Dominant, Altered Dominant, and half diminished. We'll focus soloing over dominant and altered dominant sounds.

G Jazz Minor

3 5 6 3 5 2 4 5 | 5 4 2 5 3 6 5 3

Jazz Minor Application Over Dominant Chords

In Jazz, the dominant 7th chord comes in two flavors: chords that resolve, and chords that don't. TYPE ONE Dom7 chords are those Dom 7th chords which resolve to the "I" chord (as is common in the ever popular "II/V/I" progression). One SOUND characteristic about the TYPE ONE chord is that these chords make use of altered tensions #5, b5, #9, b9. For TYPE ONE chords, root the Jazz Minor Scale, 1/2 step above the root: G7 = Ab Jazz Minor.

TYPE ONE Application: G7/Ab Jazz Minor Scale

9 !9 3 5 !5 7 R 9 | 4 1 2 4 1 3 0 1

Ab Jazz Minor

Dmi9 G7^{b9} CMA9

TYPE 2 Dominant 7th Application

The second dom7 chord type we'll call TYPE 2, any dominant seventh chord which does NOT resolve to the "I" chord. These also chords lack the altered tension found in TYPE 1 chords. Instead, these chords have natural color tones: 9, 13, etc. For TYPE 2 chords, root a jazz minor up a 5th from the root of a chord. G7=D Jazz Minor.

TYPE TWO Application: G7/D Jazz Minor

G7 **D Jazz Minor**

5 13 7 R 9 3 5 5

5 2 3 5 7 4 6 7

The following progression makes use of both TYPE 1 & 2 Dom 7 chords. Note that the G7 in measure three DOESN'T resolve to the "I" chord (this is the hallmark of the TYPE 2 application. Over this chord, play a D Jazz Minor. The Gb7 in measure 7 DOES resolve to the "I" (TYPE 1)... Gb7 = G Jazz Minor.

D Jazz Minor G Jazz Minor

FMA7 G Gmi7 G^{b7} FMA7 G^{b7}