

Unit 9 ~More Scales!

So far we have looked at major and minor scales. These are arguably the most important scales to know about, at least for Western music up to say around 1900. But there are many other scales used by composers and musicians in both classical and other types of music. Let's take a look at some of them.

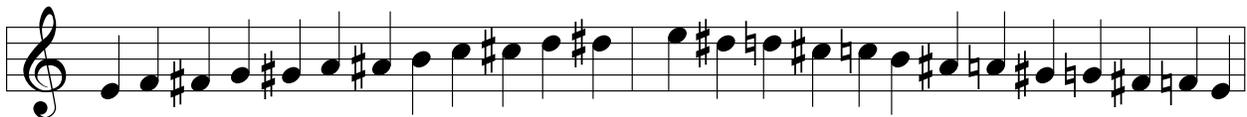
The Chromatic Scale



The above shows C chromatic scale. The chromatic scale includes every note, so the interval between each scale degree is a semitone. Unlike major and minor scales, the chromatic scale contains no whole steps. There are twelve notes in the chromatic scale.

How do you write a chromatic scale? There is more than one way, but one good way is to write the tonic and dominant notes once only, and every other note twice. Look at the above scale. You will see that I started with one tonic (C). Then there are two D's, two E's, and two F's. Then we only have one dominant, G (a perfect 5th above C). After that we have two of each again: two A's, and two B's.

The accidentals you write may vary from scale to scale, depending on your tonic note. For example, here is E chromatic:



The Whole Tone Scale

The whole tone scale is made up of nothing but whole tones:

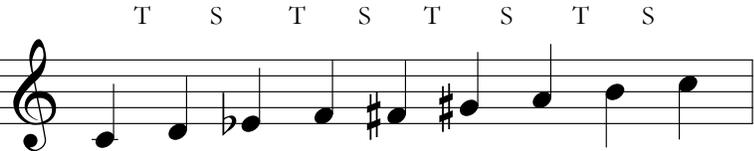


Whole tone scales have six notes (I'm not counting the repeated tonic). The above has C - D - E - F# - Ab - Bb. Notice that there is no G. This is because there are seven available note names (A, B, C, D, E, F, and G) but the scale only needs six. So every whole tone scale will have a 'missing note', and contain a gap somewhere. The interval across the gap is a diminished 3rd, which is enharmonically the same as a major 2nd. We could have written this scale like this, with the gap in a different place. Both are correct, and the following scale will sound exactly the same as the previous one:



The Octatonic Scale

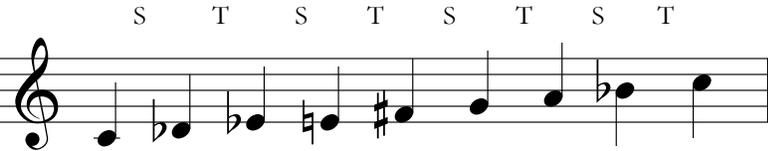
The octatonic scale, as the name might suggest, has eight notes! The octatonic scale is formed by alternating tones and semitones:



Now, since there are only seven available note names and there are eight notes in the scale, one note name has to be used twice. In the above, there are two F's, an F natural and an F sharp. I could have written this scale like this, with two D's instead of two F's:



The above two octatonic scales begin with a whole step. You could instead start your octatonic scale on a half-step:



Pentatonic Scales

Pentatonic scales are scales with five notes. They are used all over the world and are very common in folk music. There are various ways to make these scales. Two common ways are the major pentatonic scale and the minor pentatonic scale.

The major pentatonic is like a regular major scale, but missing the 4th and 7th degrees:



The minor pentatonic is like a natural minor scale, but missing the 2nd and 6th degrees:



The Blues Scale

The blues scale is the scale used in Blues music. It's very similar to the minor pentatonic, but has an extra note, inserted between the subdominant and dominant notes. This results in the subdominant note name being duplicated. In the following example, we have F and F♯.



You can play a blues scale on the piano easily by playing all the black notes, plus the A. This is actually an E♭ blues scale:

