

Melody and Harmony Relationships in Minor Keys

Ted Greene — 1976-03-05

In the Baroque period there were, as you know, three types of minor scales used: **NATURAL**, **HARMONIC** and **MELODIC**. When a Baroque composer (such as Bach, Handel, Scarlatti or Vivaldi) wrote a piece of music in a minor key, he did not stick to one of the three types exclusively, but rather, mixed them up according to what kind of chords he wanted to imply or use in his *harmony*. The following is a list of the conventional melody and harmony relationships of the time.

But first a few general guidelines:

1. In the **MELODIC** minor scale, the R6th was rarely, if ever used without the R7th. [**R=Raised**].
2. In the **HARMONIC** minor scale, the 6th was usually not followed with the R7th or vice versa, except in dominant harmony (as you will see below).
3. If you have already learned somewhere that the melodic minor is supposed to ascend in one form and descend in another, I'm sorry to say this but it's simply not true. There are many examples in the music of Bach, for instance, of the R6th and R7th being used in a descending melody (see example page). There are reasons, that seemed to be logical, for the theory of 2 different forms of melodic minors, but composers didn't abide by this reasoning, as a casual study of their works shows.

DIATONIC HARMONY

CHORD | **SCALE**

i : **Melodic** minor for ascending and descending (more rare) melodies.
Harmonic minor for ascending and descending melodies.
Natural minor for descending melodies only.

i7 : **Natural** minor for ascending and descending melodies.

(from here on down, assume that a given scale is used both ascending & descending).

ii°, **iiø7** : Natural and Harmonic, or Natural with a *raised 3rd*.

ii, **ii7** : Melodic, Melodic with a *raised 3rd*, or II Melodic Minor

III, **III7** : Natural

(III+), **(III7+)** : Melodic and Harmonic

iv, **iv7**, **iv6** : Harmonic and Natural, also on iv: iv Melodic, Harmonic and Natural, also on
iv7: iv7 Natural, also on iv6: iv Melodic.

IV, **IV7** : Melodic.

- V, V7** : Melodic and Harmonic (with 6th to R7th [or vice versa] sometimes).
V7b9 : Harmonic (with 6th to R7th [or vice versa] sometimes).
VI, VI7 : Harmonic and Natural.
Rvi°, **Rviø7** : Melodic.
VII, VII7 : Natural.
Rvii° : Melodic and Harmonic (with 6th to R7th [or vice versa] sometimes).
Rvii°7 : Harmonic (with 6th to R7th [or vice versa] sometimes).
(Rviiø7) : Melodic.
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- I** : Picardy Scale (1 2 3 4 5 b6 b7 8) or think of it as the iv Melodic minor, centering in the V region (1/2 cadence in iv Melodic minor).

Actually the ideal (but most time-consuming) way to know this material is to think of a different scale for each different chord, these scales all having the same letter name as the roots of the chords they are being used for. The advantage of this way is that in the long run, it is less confusing (this will become clear later). But for now, the above guides will probably prove helpful.

There are more “exotic” chords used in Baroque harmony, but the melody and harmony relationships of these will come later, chromatic tones will also be discussed.

Examples of Melody & Harmony Relationships in Minor Keys

① Am B° C Dm
etc.

①a Am B° C+ Dm
etc.

MELODIC MINOR

①b
etc.

MELODIC MINOR

①c
etc.

INCORRECT IN BAROQUE PERIOD

R6th without R7th

② J.S. BACH (1st Violin Sonata) EXCERPT
etc.

MELODIC MINOR

WHY NOT E♮ HERE?

③ J.S. BACH (1st Lute Suite) EXCERPT ALLEMANDE
etc.

MELODIC MINOR

③a
etc.

DELAYED RESOLUTION

③b
etc.

MELODIC MINOR

Could BACH have used harmonic minor here?
Could he have used natural minor and created a V type sound?

④ GIGUE EXCERPT
etc.

MELODIC MINOR

⑤ G.F. HANDEL (7th Suite) EXCERPT ALLEGRO
etc.

D HARMONIC MINOR (R7th to 6th)

What chord is implied here?

⑥ TOCATTA EXCERPT
etc.

MELODIC MINOR

⑦ MINUET EXCERPT
etc.

MELODIC MINOR

Try F♯ and see what you think.

⑧ GIGUE EXCERPT
etc.

E MELODIC MINOR

⑨ Am E
etc.

Desc. use of Melodic Minor on I

⑩ Dm (Melodic Minor on iv) E7 Am
etc.

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DIATONIC HARMONY

| CHORD | SCALE | |
|---|----------------------|--|
| i | MELODIC | minor for ascending and descending melodies |
| | HARMONIC | " " " " " " " " |
| | NATURAL | " " " " " " " " |
| i ⁷ | " | " " " " " " " " |
| | " | " " " " " " " " |
| | " | " " " " " " " " |
| ii ^o , ii ⁷ | NATURAL and HARMONIC | ; or NATURAL WITH A RAISED 3RD. |
| ii ^o , ii ⁷ | MELODIC | ; MELODIC with a RAISED 3RD, or ii ^o MELODIC MINOR |
| III, III ⁷ | NATURAL | |
| (III ⁺ , III ⁷⁺) | MELODIC and HARMONIC | |
| IV, IV ⁷ , IV ⁶ | HARMONIC and NATURAL | ; also on IV: IV MEL., HAR. and NAT.; also on IV ⁺ : IV ⁺ NAT.; also on IV ⁶ : IV MELODIC |
| V, V ⁷ | MELODIC | |
| V, V ⁷ | MELODIC and HARMONIC | (with 6th to R7th [or vice versa] sometimes) |
| V ⁷ b9 | HARMONIC | (with 6th to R7th [or vice versa] sometimes) |
| VI, VI ⁷ | HARMONIC and NATURAL | |
| Rv ^{io} , Rv ^{io} 7 | MELODIC | |
| VII, VII ⁷ | NATURAL | |
| Rv ^{io} | MELODIC and HARMONIC | (with 6th to R7th [or vice versa] sometimes) |
| Rv ^{io} 7 | HARMONIC | (with 6th to R7th [or vice versa] sometimes) |
| (Rv ^{io} 7) | MELODIC | |

I : PICARDY SCALE (1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8) or think of it as the IV MELODIC MINOR centering in the V region (1/2 cadence in IV MEL. MIN.)
 (PICARDY)
 3RD

Actually the ideal (but most time-consuming) way to know this material is to think of a different scale for each different chord, these scales all having the same letter name as the roots of the chords they are being used for. The advantage of this way is that in the long run, it is less confusing (this will become clear later), but for now, the above guides will probably prove helpful.

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EXAMPLES OF MELODY + HARMONY RELATIONSHIPS IN MINOR KEYS

① Am B^o C Dm
 ①a Am B^o C+ D
 ①b MELODIC MINOR
 MELODIC MINOR
 ② INCORRECT IN BAROQUE PERIOD R6th without R7th
 J.S. BACH (1st VIOLIN SONATA) EXCERPT
 ③ J.S. BACH (1st LUTE SUITE) EXCERPTS ALLEMANDE
 DELAYED RESOLUTION
 ③a
 ③b MELODIC MINOR
 EXCERPT FROM GIGUE
 MELODIC MINOR
 F could Bach have used harmonic minor here?
 could he have used natural minor and created a ♯ type sound?
 ④ F.F. HANDEL 3rd SUITE - ALLEGRO - EXCERPT
 D HARMONIC MINOR (R7th to 6th)
 ⑤
 ⑥ TO CATTIA - EXCERPT
 WHAT CHORD IS IMPLIED HERE?
 ⑦ MINUET - EXCERPT
 MEL. MINOR (TRY F# and see what you think)
 ⑧ F.F. HANDEL 3rd SUITE - ALLEGRO - EXCERPT
 MEL. MINOR
 ⑨ Am DES. USE OF MEL. MINOR on i Dm (MELODIC MINOR on iv) E7 Am
 ⑩

Empty musical staves for practice or additional examples.