

7th Chord Scales

(Scales that work for the 7th chords)

Ted Greene — 1975, July 15

1) **MIXOLYDIAN SCALE:** This scale is a major scale with a b7th tone. Try making this alteration to your fingerings of the major scales. You will eventually notice that the new fingerings are the same as those for a *major scale whose root is a 4th higher*.

Examples: C Mixolydian scale = F major scale.
D Mixolydian scale = G major scale, and so on.

So you already know your Mixolydian scales, it is just a question of viewpoint. You may wonder why you should bother with this new viewpoint if the notes are just the same as a major scale anyway. The reason is that sometimes 7th chords (or their extensions) act as tonal centers or keys, and you don't want to have to think of the related major scales first.

Examples:

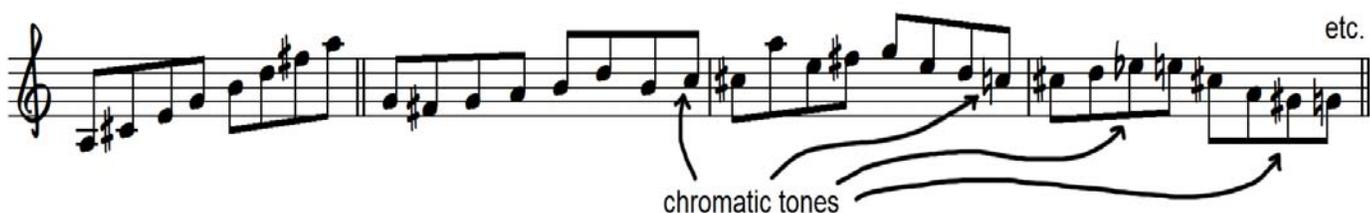
Suppose you are playing a blues in the key of C and your first few chords are C7 | F7 | C7 | C7 | etc. If you know your Mixolydian scales you can play C Mixolydian | F Mixolydian | C Mixolydian | C Mixolydian | etc. But if you only know your Mixolydian scales in terms of their related major scales you would have to think F major | Bb major | F major | F major | etc., which is a real drag and a time waster too.

Mixolydian scales sound good when you wish to convey the sound of the following chords:

7th, 9th, 13th, 7/6, 7sus, 11, 13sus, 7/6sus.

If you play a run in the Mixolydian scale, using all of the notes in the scale, you are basically conveying the sound of all of the above chords (but if you focus on one group of notes or arpeggios more than the other notes in the scale, then you are basically conveying just that sound).

Examples of Mixolydian runs in A:



2) **7#9+, 7b9+ (7#9b5, 7b9b5) SCALE:** This scale contains the following notes: 1, b2(b9), b3(#9), 3, (optional #4 or b5), #5, and b7. The fingerings of it are the same as those for a *Melodic Minor whose root is a 1/2 step higher*.

Examples: E7#9b9+ scale = F melodic minor scale.
F7#9b9+ scale = F# melodic minor scale, and so on.

See the separate page on Melodic Minors for fingerings and arpeggios.

The 7#9b9+ scale sounds good for conveying the 4 chords listed above (7#9+, 7b9+, 7#9b5, 7b9b5). You might be wondering if a complex scale like this will fit when playing over a simple chord. The answer is a qualified yes. → Suppose you were supposed to play some single lines over the progression C – E7 – Am. You could play the E7#9b9+ scale over the E7 chord, but you should realize that you are indirectly adding the #9, b9, #5 and maybe even the b5. Let's take another example: Suppose you are playing a blues in E and the first chord is an E7 or an E7#9. Now, if you play the E7#9b9+ scale here, for the first chord, you would be indirectly playing an E7#9+ or E7b9+ (or both) to start the progression, and since this might sound rather screwy in chords, it will probably sound rather screwy in lines, which brings us to a generally guideline:

Only play a scale where you would be happy about conveying all the chords implied in that scale.

3) **7b9+ SCALE:** This scale contains the following notes → 1, b2(b9), 3, 4, 5, b6(#5), and b7. The fingerings are the same as those for a *Harmonic Minor whose root is a 4th higher*.

Examples: E7b9+ scale = A harmonic minor scale.
F7b9+ scale = Bb harmonic minor scale, and so on.

See the separate page on Harmonic minors for fingerings and arpeggios.
Try figuring out what chords are conveyed by this scale.

4) **13+11 (OVERTONE DOMINANT) SCALE:** This scale contains the 1, 2, 3, #4(#11), 5, 6, and b7. The fingerings of it are the same as those for a *Melodic Minor whose root is a 5th higher*.

Examples: C13+11 scale = G melodic minor scale.
C#13+11 scale = G# melodic minor scale, and so on.

This scale conveys the sound of the 13+11, +11, and 9b5 chords, among others, and *used in context*, it is probably the most beautiful scale of all.

See sheet on Melodic minors for fingerings and arpeggios.

5) **13b9 SCALE:** This scale contains the 1, b2(b9), 3, 4, 5, 6, and b7.
 The fingerings are (listed on A7):

Scale	Chord	Arpeggios.....	Scale	Chord	Arpeggios.....
2	2	2	3	3	3
					either
Scale	Chord	Arpeggios.....	Scale	Chord	Arpeggio
4	5	4	7	9	7
		either			or E
Scale	Chords.....	Arpeggios.....			
9	10	11	9	11	
			or E		

These sounds basically convey the 13b9 chord and fragments.

6) **1/2, WHOLE SCALE:** This scale contains the 1, b2(b9), b3(#9), 3, #4(+11), 5, 6, b7; it is an equal interval scale, meaning there is a symmetry or pattern to the notes – this pattern is 1/2 step, whole step, 1/2 step, whole step, etc. The scale is more easily understood by the following (hopefully):

Take this:

A7b9 noR

and add notes 1/2 step below each of these tones and you get:

A13b9#11

All of these notes are minor 3rds apart.

So here are the [1/2, whole scale] fingerings (given as A7):

Scale	Chords.....	Arpeggios.....
2	2	2
5	5	5
8	8	8
11	11	11

You might try C for Bb in the higher registers (#9 for b9).

This scale works well in conveying a 13b9#11, 13b9, 13#9, 7b9b5(#11), 7#9b5(#11).

7) **7#9 SCALE:** This scale contains the 1, b3(#9), 3, 5, and b7; also possible are the 4, or #4(b5); (maybe even the 2nd (9th) and 6th). You might try adding some of these tones into these sounds. The fingerings are given as F#7's:

Scale	Chord	Arpeggio	Scale	Chord	Arpeggio
2	2	2	4	4	4
7	7	7	9	9	9
11	14	11			

or F#

Notice the similarity of the arpeggios to C13b9's. Also, an interesting sidelight is that the notes of a 7#9 scale are the same as two major triads whose roots are a minor 3rd apart. Example: F#7#9 = F# triad & A triad. Besides conveying the 7#9 chord, these sounds are good blues scales (which in a way is saying the same thing.)

8) **WHOLE TONE SCALE:** This scale is another equal interval scale, containing: 1, 2, 3, #4(b5), #5, and b7. Some of the sounds conveyed are +, 7+, 9+, 7b5, 9b5 whose roots can be any note in the scale. Example: one of the 2 whole tone scales (there are only 2) contains A, B, C#, Eb, F, and G notes; therefore +, 7+, 9+, 7b5, and 9b5's are conveyed on all of these roots. Analyze it and see.

Here are fingerings of the A (B, C#, Eb, F, and G) scale:

Scale	Chords.....	Arpeggios.....	Scale	Chord	Arpeggios.....
1, 3, 5, 7, etc.			2, 4, 5, 6, etc.		

9) **9+ SCALE:** This relatively rarely used sound contains the 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, b6(#5), and b7. The fingerings are the same as those for a *melodic minor whose root is a 4th higher*. See the sheet on melodic minors.

7th CHORD SCALES (Scales that work for 7th chords) - PAGE 1

① MIXOLYDIAN SCALE: This scale is a major scale with a 6th tone. Try making this alteration to your fingerings of the major scales. You will eventually notice that the new fingerings are the same as those for a major scale whose root is a 4th higher. Examples: C MIXOLYDIAN = F MAJOR SCALE

D MIXOLYDIAN = G MAJOR and so on. So you already know your mixolydian scales, it is just a question of viewpoint. You may wonder why you should bother with this new viewpoint if the notes are just the same as a major scale anyway. The reason is that sometimes 7th chords (or their extensions) act as tonal centers or keys and you don't want to have to think of the related major scales 1st. Example:

Suppose you are playing a blues in the key of C and your first few chords are C7 | F7 | C7 | C7 etc... If you know your mixolydian scales you can play C MIXOLYDIAN | F MIXOLYDIAN | C MIXOLYDIAN | C MIXOLYDIAN etc... but if you only know your mixolydian scales in terms of their related major scales you would have to think F MAJOR | Bb MAJOR | F MAJOR | F MAJOR etc. which is a real drag, and a time waster too.

MIXOLYDIAN scales sound good when you wish to convey the sound of the following chords: 7th, 9th, 13th, 7/6, 9sus, 11, 13sus, 7/6sus. If you play a run in the mixolydian scale, using ALL of the notes in the scale, you are basically conveying the sound of ALL the above chords (but if you focus on one group of notes or arpeggio more than the other notes in the scale, then you are basically conveying just that sound).

EXAMPLES OF MIXOLYDIAN runs in A



② 7#9+, 7b9+, (7#9b5, 7b9b5) SCALE: This scale contains the following notes → 1, b2 (b9), b3 (#9), 3 (OPTIONAL: #4 or b5), #5, and b7. The fingerings of it are the same as those for a MELODIC MINOR whose root is a 1/2 step higher. Examples: E7#9b9+ SCALE = F MELODIC MINOR SCALE and so on. F7#9b9+ SCALE = F# MELODIC MINOR SCALE and so on.

See the separate page on MELODIC MINORS for fingerings + arpeggios. The 7#9b9+ SCALE sounds good for conveying the 4 chords listed above (7#9+, 7b9+, 7#9b5, 7b9b5). You might be wondering if a complex scale like this will fit when played over a simpler chord. The answer is a qualified yes. → Suppose you were supposed to play some single lines over the progression C E7 Am - You could play the E7#9b9+ scale over the E7 chord but you should realize that you are indirectly adding in the #9, b9, #5 and maybe even the b5. Let's take another example: Suppose you are playing a blues in E and the first chord is an E7 or an E7#9. Now if you play the E7#9b9+ SCALE here, for the first chord, you would be indirectly playing an E7#9+ or E7b9+ (or both) to start the progression, and since this might sound rather screwy in chords, it will probably sound rather screwy in lines, which brings us to a general guideline:

ONLY PLAY A SCALE WHERE YOU WOULD BE HAPPY ABOUT CONVEYING ALL THE CHORDS IMPLIED IN THAT SCALE.

③ 7b9+ SCALE: This scale contains the following notes → 1, b2 (b9), 3, 4, 5, b6 (#5), and b7. The fingerings are the same as those for a HARMONIC MINOR whose root is a 4th higher. Examples: E7b9+ SCALE = A HARMONIC MINOR SCALE; F7b9+ = Bb HARMONIC MINOR SCALE and so on. See the separate page on HARMONIC MINORS for fingerings + arpeggios. Try figuring out what chords are conveyed by this scale.

④ 13+11 (OVERTONE DOMINANT) SCALE: This scale contains the 1, 2, 3, #4 (+11), 5, 6 and b7. The fingerings of it are the same as those for a MELODIC MINOR whose root is a 5th higher. Examples: C 13+11 SCALE = G MELODIC MINOR; C#13+11 SCALE = G# MELODIC MINOR and so on. This scale conveys the sound of the 13+11, +11 and 9b5 chords, among others, and used in context, it is probably the most beautiful scale of all. See sheet on melodic minors for fingerings + arpeggios.

