

Jazz Mandology with Ted Eschliman



Some Minor issues: Seeking Resolutions

Review:

Having explored the vertical dimensions of jazz in our first two articles, the basic “sentence” of jazz, the [‘ii V7 I’ progression](#), and its sister concept [‘tonal micro-centers’](#), we took a look last issue into the horizontal, or linear aspects of resolution in melody, examining the way specific scale degrees lead to or “resolve” within the context of the major scale.

In [Critical Decisions in Improvising: ‘Gravity’ Notes](#), we explored how the “tension” of the 2nd, 4th, 6th and 7th scale degrees gravitated toward their respective partners, 1st, 3rd, 5th, and 1st (8th) within the context of a major chord. We observed the first set of numbers coincidentally comprised a dominant functioning chord, the viim7b5 or upper notes of a V7 chord.

Just a Minor Thing...

The image shows musical notation for three E minor scales on a treble clef staff with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a common time signature (C). The scales are: 1. E Natural Minor: E4-F4-G4-A4-B4-C5-D5-E5. 2. E Harmonic Minor: E4-F4-G4-A4-B4-C#5-D5-E5. 3. E Melodic Minor (ascending): E4-F4-G4-A4-B4-C#5-D5-E5. 4. E Melodic Minor (descending): E5-D5-C#5-B4-A4-G4-F4-E4. Below the staff, fret numbers are indicated: 2 4 5 0 2 3 5 0 for the first scale; 2 4 5 0 2 3 6 0 for the second; 2 4 5 0 2 4 6 0 for the third; and 0 5 3 2 0 5 4 2 for the fourth.

This session, we want to take a closer look at the same sort of relationship within the **minor** scale. While often overlooked, it’s an even more fertile ground of **tension/resolution** opportunities. Much has been written about the variations of the **minor** scales, the **Natural**, **Harmonic**, and **Melodic** Minor, and for the purposes of understanding minor jazz harmonies, we’ll detour exploring those alternatives, and aim at specific **preceding** notes that want to RESOLVE to the minor root chord. I’ll give you license to just consider the variations on the 6th and 7th scale degree as moot for now; we really need to avoid getting bogged down and explore musical **context**.

Minor “Essence”

First, recognize the most basic understanding of “*minor-ness*” involves the 3rd scale degree. With the major scale as your reference, go to the 3rd and lower it a half step. Inarguably, this is the **THE** most distinguishing, defining tone. In the minor root chord, the 1st and the 5th remain unchanged, but it’s that 3rd that takes us into the minor realm.



Now to understand what to do with the other tones of the scale, let’s delve into the vertical (chordal) world of ‘**V7 to I**,’ or **Dominant to Tonic**, and look not only at where we end up

(I), but **how we’re going to get there** (V7)! In the example of E minor, our **V7** chord is **B7**, or **B, D#, F#, A**.

New ‘Steer’s’ Resolutions:



From that, we’ve determined the 7th scale degree needs to be raised to **D#**, and as the “leading tone,” let’s assume the majority of the time this will be the case. As we mentioned in our last article, this is the strongest “pull” in Western

(European) music. We have another “pull” with the **C** (natural) to the 5th **B**, and although its not part of the B7 chord, in jazz this extension adds a deliciously tense lowered 9th, or a **B7(b9)**.

The 4th to the 3rd is similar, though not quite as compelling, from **A** to **G**. But now we’ll jump into the world of Gypsy and Bebop and introduce an entirely new resolution, the lowered 2nd **F natural**, and resolve it to 1, **E**.

Altered States

This allows me to segue and briefly, introducing you to a jazz culinary fave, the “**Altered Scale**.”

You’ll find this called other names in jazz theory textbooks, the “Pomeroy Scale,” the “Half Diminished Scale,” and sometimes the “Half Diminished/Whole Tone Scale.” It’s a bebop musician’s favorite tool, and though it sounds terribly strange out of context, especially for those that live in a “diatonic” world, it has some of the most gripping harmonic “energy” available.

We’ll save the arcane theory lesson for a later date, and just introduce you to the sound (and feel) for right now. (If your curiosity is getting the better of you though, click on my website, [Altered Scale](#).) The point of this article is to introduce you to tones that turbo-charge your minor key resolutions.

Again, this sound may be a little strange to you right now, but if you listen to any Charlie Parker, John Coltrane, really any Post-Bebop musician, you’ll realize I just unlocked the door of really big hall for you...



Introducing the Altered Scale!

'V7 (alt) - I' resolutions to minor tonic.

Minor in Possession

www.jazzmando.com

Be aware of the scale degree relationships and resolutions in each 2nd measure.

Mandolin

TAB

Important: Connect the notes!

The above is an exercise similar to last issue's, touring you through all 12 keys via the **Circle of Fifths**. Apply the same principle of connecting the notes. The callous, "No Open Strings" policy may be driving you nuts, but for conditioning purposes, practice the exercise this way. If you you've been working on last issue's "**Guides and Gravity**" properly, I guarantee you're already getting a stronger pinky and playing closer to the fingerboard. Don't take it fast, and think of each two measures as a study unto itself. Don't forego healthy tone; remember: good tone is about what goes on *between* the notes that magical intersection where the release of the first note intersects the attack of the second.

Download a PDF file of the exercise here: [Minor in Possession](#)

Incidentally, if you rely on TAB, last month's issue included a "ghost" lower 5th line in the TAB staff because of a software glitch. You can download a corrected copy here: [Guides and Gravity](#)

Have fun with this, and let me know how this is working for you. Email me at mandohack@aol.com or as always, drop in on my website, www.jazzmando.com. Again, thanks for all the great feedback, and it's your questions that ultimately determine what content needs to be addressed here at **Jazz Mandology!**

Good tone is about what goes on <i>between</i> the notes...
