

Improvisation in Harmonic Minor

A Harmonic Minor Scale - note: b6, #7

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 1 1 3 5 = Am Triad The other ones, 2 4 6 7 = E7

Wait a minute, why is there an F in the E7 chord - and there's not even an E?!

5 E7 (b9) E7 G#o7

1 3 5 7 b9

The F in an E chord is called the Flat Nine (b9) - it's always one fret above the root. Adding the b9 to your Dominant V chords is essential to Harmonic Minor composition and improvisation. When you substitute it for the root, you are left with a diminished 7 chord, in this case G#o7. The 3rd, 5th and 7th of E7 are already in this chord - moving the E up a fret to F just makes it complete.

So, intelligent use of the harmonic minor scale in your solos begins with putting 1-3-5 over the Root chord and 2-4-6-7 over the V Dominant chord:

9 Am E7 Am E7 Am

As you can see in the last measure, scale movement is OK too, but you're still emphasizing the chord tones:

14 Am E7

16 Am E7 Am

Paint by numbers rules for now:

19 i (Am) = 1235 iv (Dm) = 1235 V7 (E7) = use the diminished 7 chord starting on the 3rd