

Minor Scales 101

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Please review and be sure you understand the structure of the Major Scale before proceeding with this handout. It is covered in the handout entitled Major Scales 101 on this website.

This handout covers three significant minor scales – Natural minor, Melodic minor and Harmonic minor. These three minor scales all share the same first five notes. When compared to the Major Scale, the minor scales use a flat third. Hence the formula:

1 – 2 – b3 – 4 – 5, or stepwise
root – whole – half – whole – whole.

Natural minor

Natural minor is known as the ‘relative minor’. It is also known as the Aeolian Mode, or sixth mode of the major scale.

The Natural minor starts on the sixth degree of its relative Major key and uses the same notes. For instance, the sixth degree of the C Major scale is A, so Am is the relative minor of C.

The C Major scale is spelled C – D – E – F – G – A – B – C.

The A natural minor scale is spelled A - B – C – D – E – F – G – A

The intervals are root - whole – half – whole – whole - half – whole - whole

Melodic minor

When compared to the Natural minor scale, the Melodic minor contains a #6 and a #7 when ascending. Classical Music Theory dictates that when descending both the 6 and the 7 are natural notes (same as Natural minor). So, the A melodic minor scale is spelled A - B – C – D – E – F# – G# – A ascending but spelled A – G – F – E – D – C – B - A descending.

The intervals ascending are root - whole – half – whole – whole - whole –whole - half

The intervals descending are root - whole – whole – half – whole - whole –half - whole

Harmonic minor

When compared to the Natural minor scale, the Harmonic minor contains a natural 6 and a #7. This interval is wide – 1 ½ steps making the scale sound somewhat exotic. This scale is very useful when a song is in a minor key and has a turnaround on a dominant 7th. i.e. Am – E7. The Am Harmonic minor is spelled A - B – C – D – E – F – G# - A

The intervals are root - whole – half – whole – whole – half – whole+half - half

The tab at the end of this handout will demonstrate these scales in two positions in the key of Am. The key of Am is the relative minor of C which contains all natural notes. For those students who want to strengthen their knowledge of the note names on the fretboard, the C and Am scales provide the opportunity to sing or say the notes of the scale as you play them to reinforce your knowledge. Incorporate practicing in other keys as you are ready.

Mechanics

When learning the minor scales in the fifth position, start with your first finger on the first fret. You will have to shift down 1 fret and back when playing these scales.

When practicing the scales pay close attention to the following:

- Even tempo (use a metronome)
- Even Volume
- Good tone (play with tips of fingers, right 'behind' the fret with knuckles bent)

Scales are excellent exercises for your fingers. They are excellent for your ears as well. When playing the Natural minor backwards, change the rhythm up a little and you will find the opening melody to the popular Christmas song "Joy to the World".

Because the musical structure of any given scale is the same regardless of key, the physical pattern of that scale on the fretboard will also be the same regardless of what key you play the scale in. Therefore, once you are familiar with the physical pattern and sound of the Am scales in the 5th position in this lesson; you can play the minor scales in other keys simply by shifting positions (where you start the pattern).

F minor – start on the first fret of the sixth string (will include a few open string notes)

G minor – start on the third fret of the 6th string

B minor – start on the seventh fret of the 6th string

C minor – start on the eighth fret of the 6th string

D minor – start on the tenth fret of the 6th string

E minor - start on the twelfth fret of the 6th string

As you practice these keys, you will notice that the distance between the frets becomes smaller as you go 'up' the neck. Therefore, the F minor scale will stretch your fingers more than the E minor scale.

Practice these. Listen for the sound of the minor scale as you learn songs. As with all things musical - have fun with it, You will be glad you did!

Am Scales - Natural, Melodic, Harmonic

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Standard tuning

♩ = 120

Natural minor - open position

Natural Minor is also known as Aeolian Mode

jz.g...

Musical notation for the Natural minor scale in open position. The treble clef staff shows the ascending and descending melodic lines. The guitar staff below shows the fretting for strings T, A, and B. The scale starts on the 1st fret of the B string.

Natural minor 5th position

Musical notation for the Natural minor scale in 5th position. The treble clef staff shows the ascending and descending melodic lines. The guitar staff below shows the fretting for strings T, A, and B. The scale starts on the 5th fret of the B string.

Melodic minor - open position

Melodic minor has a #6 & #7 ascending. Descending is identical to the natural minor

Musical notation for the Melodic minor scale in open position. The treble clef staff shows the ascending and descending melodic lines. The guitar staff below shows the fretting for strings T, A, and B. The scale starts on the 1st fret of the B string.

Melodic minor - 5th position

Musical notation for the Melodic minor scale in 5th position. The treble clef staff shows the ascending and descending melodic lines. The guitar staff below shows the fretting for strings T, A, and B. The scale starts on the 5th fret of the B string.

Harmonic minor - open position

Musical notation for the Harmonic minor scale in open position. The treble clef staff shows the ascending and descending melodic lines. The guitar staff below shows the fretting for strings T, A, and B. The scale starts on the 1st fret of the B string.

Harmonic minor - 5th position

Musical notation for the Harmonic minor scale in 5th position. The treble clef staff shows the ascending and descending melodic lines. The guitar staff below shows the fretting for strings T, A, and B. The scale starts on the 5th fret of the B string.