

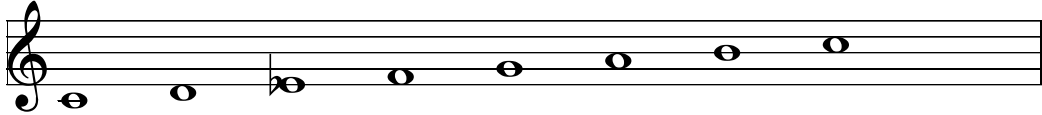
CHORDS FROM SCALES

This tutorial is all about making chords out of scales. First step is to catch a fish - not any old fish but a musical one. A bass, for instance. Not really. Read on.

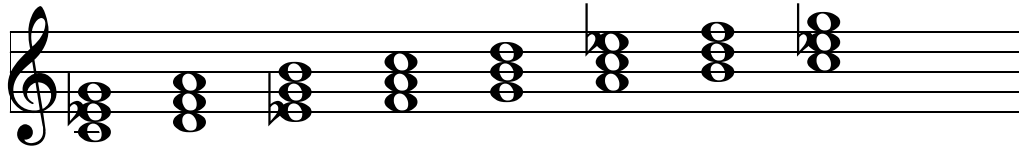
CHORDS FROM SCALES

A lot of importance has been placed upon finding the right scales which can be played against different chords (see *Hidden scales* and *Scale-Chord Relationship* in the tutorials). Finding the appropriate scales is however only the first step. To do something meaningful with the scales, you need to know how to 'get inside' them and create new things from them; otherwise you will end up merely going up and down the scales and sounding like someone practicing. To listen to someone doing this can be very boring, as I'm sure you will understand.

It's very easy to make chords out of scales. All you do is to take one of the notes, omit the following note, add the next note, omit the next...and so on. You may know that Western harmony is based on thirds - well this is what it's all about. Let's take the scale of **C minor**. This is the ascending form of C melodic minor, used for both ascending and descending. It is the same as C major but with a minor 3rd:

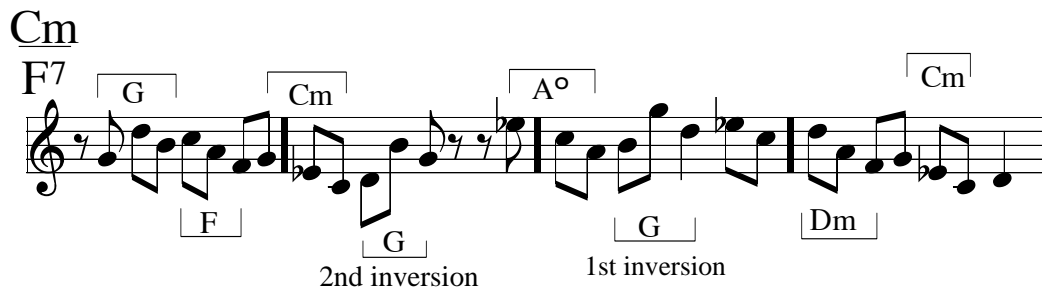


Now we'll add some 3-note chords (triads) to each of them and this is what we get:



So, in the first chord, we started with C as the bass-note, skipped the D and added the Eb, skipped the F and finally added the G to make a C minor chord. The last chord is the same as the first one, up an octave, so we'll not bother with that one again.

What this means is that when we get a scale to play on over a chord, we can use any of these chords and their inversions. For example, if we had the combination of a C minor scale to be played over an F7 chord (in effect, an F13(+11) to give it its full value), we could play a line such as this:



Obviously, in slow moving lines in particular you have to be aware not to clash with the chord by emphasising chordal phrases containing the fourth which jar against the third of the chord, as in the following examples.

C
C Δ

It is important therefore to be aware of the basic notes of the chord too, especially the third and the seventh to avoid this. In faster tempos it is not so important but you would still try and avoid phrases like that found in the second bar which end on the fourth.

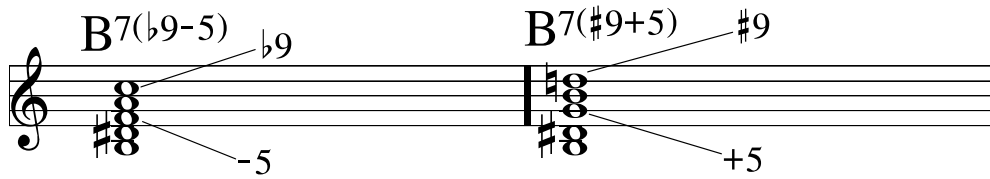
Returning to the C minor scale, you can also create 4-note chords from it, so:

Be careful not to make it sound like a technical exercise when using these chords. You can prevent this by changing direction, repeating (or omitting) some of the notes, varying the order of the notes in the sub-chords and by rhythmic variations. Eg:

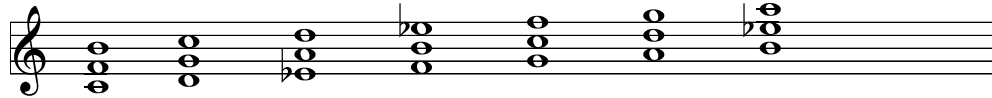
Cm
F7

You don't have to limit yourself to 4-note chords, but anything over a 5-note chord can get unwieldy and it's often best to think of it differently. Here are the 5-note chords:

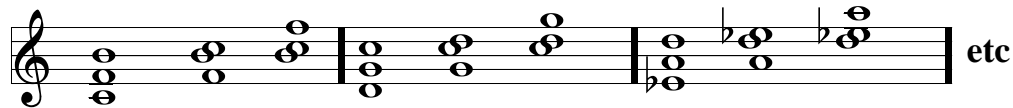
One of the fundamental things about traditional chord-building is that each chord should have a third. The last chord from this scale is unique in that it can have either a minor third (as shown here) or a major third, albeit written enharmonically as an Eb. The Eb (D#) could be used in place of the D to give a B7(b9-5) or you could start chord-building afresh from the Eb (D#) to give a B7(#9+5), thus:



Chords can also be built by taking a note, skipping 2 notes, adding a note, skipping 2 notes, and so on. This will give you chords built out of fourths. From the Cm scale, we get these sub-chords:

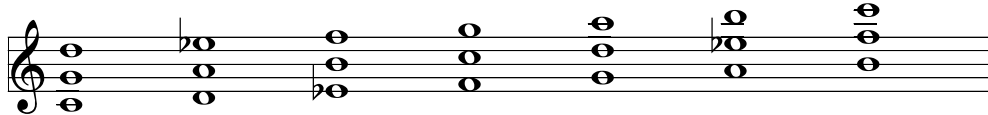


Note that there are 2 inversions of each one:

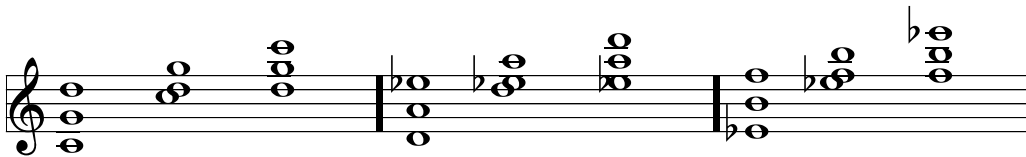


You can also use 4-note quartal harmony or larger chords, but this can get very awkward.

Chords built from fifths is also possible. Take a note, skip 3 notes, add the next note...



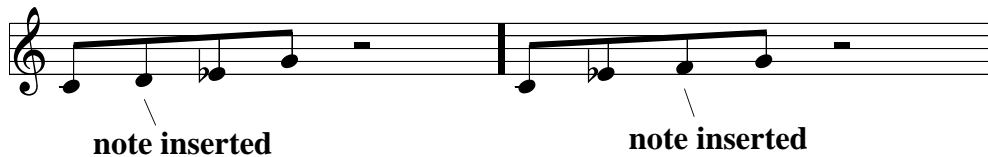
Two inversions are also possible for these chords:



It is not really that practical in improvising to think of the inversions of these chords and they lose their impact when inverted.

As well as playing just the notes of the chords, other notes can be used to fill in some of the gaps in the chords. For example, a triad can be partially filled in like this:

Cm triad



All of these things give a lot of scope for playing on scales (over chords). Also don't forget you can also add chromatic notes of various kinds. Remember though that whatever you do, make it musical and you will enjoy it and others will too.

