

SHORT SCALES

By short scales I refer to scales of 4 to 6 notes. Melody lines consist of a mixture of scalar runs and arpeggios. By using short scales, you automatically get this mixture and so the solo line has a built-in melodic ingredient.

4-note scales

The easiest way to find short scales is to start off with a full scale and select those notes from it that you want to use - the best ones are those which fit a number of different chords, not only those within the (full) scale but other scales. When you have decided on the notes, you can then treat them as the raw material for solo passages, using all the tricks you would normally employ.

Take, for instance, the C major scale: C D E F G A B (C)

Choose any 4 notes, preferably avoiding straight runs.

You might come up with C D E G or C E F G or C F G A or C F G B etc.

My own favourite is C D F G which is also the chord of C sus, but it can be used against various other chords in the C major scale, with a bit of caution where the F might clash against the chords which contain the E, such as Em7. That limits it a little.

But C D F G can also be found in other keys, and chords derived from them, for example, the scales of Eb major, Bb major, and F major, and the chords of F69, Eb^Δ9, Bb69, Ab^Δ(+11) or (-5), E7alt, A7alt, B7alt.

Another favourite of mine taken from C major scale is E F A B. (This is equivalent to C Db F G in the key of Ab major if you want to compare this with the first example.)

5-note scales

These scales consist mainly of the major and minor pentatonic scales and pentatonic scales with flattened 6th notes, for example, C major pentatonic with a flattened 6th is :

C D E G Ab, whereas C minor pentatonic scale with a flattened 6th is:

C D Eb G Ab.

Find out which scales and which chords these fit and use as you would 4-note scales.

You might also find some other 5-note scales by taking 5 notes from a scale. If you are more daring you might even just choose a cluster of 5 notes at random, but you will find it more difficult knowing where you can use it.

6-note scales

There are a few authodox 6-note scales about which it is worth knowing. These consist of two 3-note chords, triads or otherwise, taken from different keys and re-arranged to form a scale.

The **Tritone** scale occurs where you take 2 major triads a tritone apart and put them together. Eg. C E G + Gb Bb Db rearranged as a scale becomes:

C Db E Gb G Bb (C)

This is actually a shortened version of the diminished scale starting on the Bb (a tone below): Bb C Db Eb E Gb G A Bb, or starting on C:

C Db Eb E Gb G A Bb (C)

You can use this as a substitute for the full diminished. or you could use the tritone scale as a sort of major scale (C major, here) with a few exotic notes thrown in. It could there be used in place of a C major scale where the context allows (ie. against a C chord, but not against a C^Δ.) It could also be used as a substitute for an F major scale (in the right context again) because of the presence of the Bb, so you could play it against a C7 chord.

Another well-established 6-note scale is the **augmented** scale, formed by adding two augmented triads together, a semitone apart: C E G# plus Db F A thus becomes:

C Db E F G# A

Note that this consists of 3 lots of minor seconds, with the lowest of the pair a major third apart.

This would work well against an F major chord (a perfect fourth higher) where the G# (Ab) is like a blues note.

By following the same procedure you can come up with some other 6-note scales, ie. choose 3 notes from one scale and 3 notes from another scale making sure you do not duplicate any of the notes, and hey presto, another scale. Knowing how to apply them is more difficult and trial and error is probably the best bet without getting too bogged down in theory.