

Exotic Scales

by Dennis Winge

Want to spice up your written or improvised melodies? Try some of these more exotic scales. The obvious choices are not even mentioned below (as in, for example, playing a major scale over a major 7 chord). All the examples are able to be heard in [this video](#).

I. Major 7 Chords

Lydian (4th mode major scale)												
1		2		3		#4	5		6		7	8
Lydian Augmented (3rd mode melodic minor)												
1		2		3		#4		#5	6		7	8
Ionian #5 (or Major Augmented) (3rd mode of harmonic minor)												
1		2		3	4			#5	6		7	8
Harmonic Major												
1		2		3	4		5	b6			7	8
Double Harmonic Major/ Byzantine Scale / Bhairav												
1	b2			3	4		5	b6			7	8
Enigmatic Major												
1	b2			3		#4		#5		#6	7	8

II. Dominant 7 Chords

Lydian dominant (4th mode melodic minor)												
1		2		3		#4	5		6	b7		8
Phrygian Dominant (5th mode harmonic minor)												
1	b2			3	4		5	b6		b7		8
Diminished (half-whole)												
1	b2		b3	3		#4	5		6	b7		8
Whole Tone												
1		2		3		#4		#5		b7		8

Hungarian Major												
1			#2	3		#4	5		6	b7		8
Super Locrian (or Altered) (7th mode of melodic minor)												
1	b2		b3	b4		b5		b6		b7		8

III. Minor 7 Chords

Melodic Minor												
1		2	b3		4		5		6		7	8
Harmonic minor												
1		2	b3		4		5	b6			7	8
Phrygian												
1	b2		b3		4		5	b6		b7		8
Neapolitan Major												
1	b2		b3		4		5		6		7	8
Neapolitan Minor												
1	b2		b3		4		5	b6			7	8
Enigmatic Minor												
1	b2		b3			#4	5			#6	7	8

IV. Half-Diminished Chords

Locrian Natural 2 (6th mode of melodic minor)												
1		2	b3		4	b5		b6		b7		8
Locrian Natural 6 (2nd mode of harmonic minor)												
1	b2		b3		4	b5			6	b7		8
Locrian Natural 7												
1	b2		b3		4	b5		b6			7	8
Half-Diminished b4 (6th mode of Neapolitan major)												
1		2	b3	b4		b5		b6		b7		8

V. Diminished Chords

Diminished (whole-half)												
1		2	b3		4	b5		b6	6		7	8
Diminished (half-whole)												
1	b2		b3	3		#4	5		6	b7		8
Altered Diminished (or Ultralocrian) (7th mode harmonic minor)												

1	b2		b3	3		b5		b6	bb7			8
Lydian Diminished (4th mode harmonic major)												
1		2	b3			#4	5		6		7	8
Diminished b9 (7th mode harmonic major)												
1	b2		b3		4	b5		b6	bb7			8

Of course, for any of these, if you were to dig into them for any period of time in an everyday musical context, you might have to modify the harmonic structure in which they were presented. For example, say you were using Neapolitan Major over a Gmin7 chord. The fact that the chord has a flat 7 and the scale does not could cause a clash. So if the piece of music in which you are using the scale is prepared, you might want to indicate the chordal accompaniment as a G min(maj7) chord.

However, this does not imply that you can't or shouldn't use these scales spontaneously. If you did play a G Neapolitan Major scale over Gm7, be sure to do so deliberately or perhaps even boldly so that the harsher intervals of the flat 2 or natural 7 don't sound like an accident. Perhaps your accompanist(s)'s ears will be sharp enough to adjust their harmonic backdrop accordingly on the fly!

In any case, these can also be springboards to more adventurous writing. Writing and playing in a specific mode is fun in and of itself, but learning to hear and play more exotic modes can lead a musician into thinking in intervals as opposed to scales. In other words, you may be playing over Gm7 and simply want to hear an *ab* (the flat 2) or an *#7* (the natural 7), and so you play either or both of those without having to think to yourself "now what scale is this again?" You just play everything as if it were all the same scale: the chromatic scale where all 12 notes are available all the time.