

# How to Create a Groove Using Harmonized Scales

by Dennis Winge

## I. Introduction

Many times in lessons, I create a groove for students (using a looper or midi-generating pedal or software) on the fly for them to solo over or practice switching chords with. The advantages of doing this as opposed to using pre-made backing tracks (on Youtube, for example) are:

1. The tempo is exactly suited for whatever they are working on, be it certain picking techniques, chord switching, etc.
2. The chords and key are exactly tailored to whatever the context is in class
3. The loop goes on infinitely long.
4. The style is exactly appropriate.
5. There are distractions such as ads, technical glitches or time taken up to search for the right grooves.

But these are all just teaching advantages. What about the *musical* advantages?

## II. Musical Advantages to Using Harmonized Scales

Making up your own grooves enhance your ability to, among many others:

1. Write songs and progressions
2. Increase your chord vocabulary
3. Increase your rhythm guitar skills

On this last point: back in the days before computers, I used to use a tape recorder. It may have been cumbersome by today's standards, but it really shaped up my rhythm guitar skills because I was constantly making backing tracks for myself. Plus, there is a distinct usefulness in hearing your own accompaniment from the point of view of a soloist, which creating your own backing track (live, not by typing chords into a computer) allows you immediately do.

So, how do create chord progressions?

## III. Using Harmonized Scales to Create Progressions - Major Keys

A harmonized scale is a way to make chords out of any scale, and is the basis for Western harmony. If you are not familiar with [how to harmonize a scale](#), see my article linked here.

Suppose we are in the key of G, and you are working on your G major scale. The harmonized scale for this key is:

I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	I
Gmaj	Amin	Bmin	Cmaj	D	Em	F#dim	Gmaj

You may also add 7ths to the chords if you want them to sound jazzier:

Gmaj7	Amin7	Bmin7	Cmaj7	D7	Em7	F#m7b5	Gmaj7
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Even just 2 chords will make an effective progression for G major, like these:

||: G | Am :||

Or

||: G | % | D7 | % :||

Of course you are free to add as many other chords as you want, like this:

||: G | C | Am | D7 :||

Or

||: G | D | Em | C :||

Also, G doesn't have to be the first chord, it could be elsewhere, as in:

||: Am | % | C | % | D | % | G | % :||

Do yourself a big favor and write out the harmonized scales in all 12 major and minor keys, and you will suddenly have a wealth of harmonic possibilities from which you can make up chord progressions all day long.

#### IV. Using Harmonized Scales to Create Progressions - Minor Keys

A minor key is formed by making the VI chord of a major key into the I chord and re-ordering the rest of the scale accordingly. Look at the G harmonized scale above and you will see that the VI chord is Em. The Em harmonized scale then becomes:

I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	I
Em	F#dim	G	Am	Bm	C	D	Em

or

Em7	F#m7b5	Gmaj7	Amin7	Bmin7	Cmaj7	D7	Em7
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You can just as easily make chord progressions in Em as you did in G:

||: Em | G | Am | C D :||

The only caveat is that often in a minor key the V chord becomes dominant (i.e. a 7<sup>th</sup> chord). Compare the sound of these two progressions:

||: Em | Bm :||

and

||: Em | B7 :||

The B7 chord pulls you back to the I chord of Em much more strongly, so you may substitute a dominant chord at the V slot any time in creating a progression. Consider this simple but very-fun-to-play-over Latin groove:

||: Em Am | B7 Am :||

Here is another famous example of using the V dominant:

||: Em | B7 | D | A | C | G | Am | B7 :||

|| C | G | Am | Em | C | G | Am | B7 ||

Do you recognize the song? If you really want to master the harmonized scales, I highly recommend that you *transpose* this song into all 12 keys. To transpose is to take the same note-relationships and move them into a different key, and you will still hear the song because the note and chord intervals are what makes the song recognizable much more so than the key.

How do you do this? Take note of the *roman numerals* in the harmonized scales above. The progression of the famous song in Em above would look like this:

||: I | V7 | VII | IVmaj | VI | III | IV | V7 :||

|| VI | III | IV | I | VI | III | IV | V7 ||

Notice we simply indicated when something was *non-diatonic* (i.e. outside the key in some way) like the first IV chord was A instead of Am so we just wrote "IVmaj."

So now let's transpose this song. Put this into the key of Am and you get:

||: Am | E7 | G | D | F | C | Dm | E7 :||

|| F | C | Dm | Am | F | C | Dm | E7 ||

## V. Conclusion

Analyzing progressions of your favorite songs is essential if you want to understand how harmony works. (By the way the song example above was "Hotel California.") But don't get bogged down, either. Just pick a few chords from any of the 24 harmonized scales (12 for major and 12 for minor), choose a rhythmic context (time signature, tempo, and feel) and there's your instant backing track. Make 2 or 3 complimentary sections and now you

have chordal basis of a song. The possibilities are endless in creating progressions whether they be for improvisation, chord vocabulary, or full-fledged compositions. Good luck and have fun.