

The Third Harmonic Environment

The third harmonic environment begins with a leading half step. This exotic sound is very prominent in flamenco and Middle Eastern music.

3 4 • 5 • 6 • 7 1 • 2 • | 3

The leading half step

The most striking feature of the third harmonic environment is the leading half step movement from 3 to 4 which begins the scale. It's very unusual in Western music to hear just a half step between the tonal center (in this case note 3) and the next degree of the scale (in this case note 4).

If you skip ahead and take a look at the other harmonic environments that we study in this jam tracks collection, you'll see that in all but two harmonic environments, the first interval in the scale is always a whole step. This leading half step is what gives the third harmonic environment its characteristic dark and brooding sound.

Practice tips

One of the things you'll notice in the music of great improvisers is how much care and attention they put into the sound of each note. From the very first note they play, they are intensely focused on producing a beautiful *sound*. To a great musician, there are no unimportant notes.

It's important to realize that this beauty isn't something that gets tacked onto your music at some later date, after you've already reached a certain level as an improviser. It's up to YOU to make your music beautiful. As an improviser, producing a beautiful sound is vital to maintaining your own creative inspiration. (It's hard to feel passionately inspired about the solo you're about to play if you've already flubbed the first several notes.)

So as you improvise, I encourage you to treat your own musical ideas with respect. There is nothing arrogant or foolish about giving your best performance as an artist right from the very first day. On the contrary, playing each note with love and care shows your humility and respect for the music. Embrace this part of our work as improvisers.

The sounds only become beautiful when WE make them beautiful.

Using the jam tracks

This time you'll be building the third harmonic environment on your instrument. In the accompanying mp3 jam tracks, the filename tells you where to locate note 3 on your instrument. (Remember to transpose this note for your instrument if you play a transposing instrument.)

For example, the jam track in the key of A indicates that note 3 = C# for this track. So you just need to go to the note C# on your instrument and imagine this to be your note 3. Then use the tonal map drawing above to construct the rest of the scale.

The jam tracks in this collection let you experience the sounds of each harmonic environment in three very different ways:

Meditative. This is the best place to start. The meditative tracks give you lots of space for deep contemplation of the sounds. These tracks are ideal for learning the musical lessons contained in each harmonic environment. Play slowly and listen deeply to each note you play. Think of this activity as your opportunity to get to know the raw materials of your art. Later in the other tracks you can focus on creating music with these sounds. But first you should take the time to really get to know each sound, and the meditative tracks are perfect for that.

Modern. The modern tracks allow you to hear each harmonic environment in a style that will be more familiar to you. These tracks will help you discover the beautiful melodic possibilities that each harmonic environment offers you. Use these tracks to practice creating your own music, and embrace the creative challenge of finding your own musical voice within these diverse styles.

Jazz. The jazz tracks give you an opportunity to really stretch out and follow your imagination. These tracks provide the ideal supporting environment for more intellectual or abstract modal playing. Use these tracks to push the limits of your playing, both creatively and physically.

Note about transposing for wind instruments

Remember that not all instruments use the same names for the notes. In the tracks, the key listed for each jam track always refers to the concert key. If you play an instrument that is not in concert key, remember to transpose this key name to the corresponding key on your instrument. (If you're not sure how to do this for your instrument, a quick Google search will lead you to many clear explanations.)