21 Bebop Scale Patterns for Guitar

One of the most widely used concepts in jazz improvisation, the Bebop Scale has long been a staple in the vocabulary of many of the genres great artists. While many players study this scale, they often practice it descending only, or with its related Dominant 7th Arpeggio ascending on the front end, but few people work this scale with patterns and phrases as they would the Pentatonic Scales or Major Scale.

For this reason I've compiled 21 different patterns that you can use to practice your Bebop Scale fingerings on the guitar, most of which come from David Baker's Bebop books, and all of which come from the jazz tradition and can be found in the solos of greats such as Wes Montgomery, Johnny Smith, Charlie Parker and many more.

Before you dive in to these patterns, check out my article on Bebop Scale fingerings. I was turned on to this unique way of playing the Bebop Scale by the great L.A. guitarist Jon Bremen, who in turn learned them from jazz education legend David Baker, and if you can get these scale shapes under your fingers, then the following patterns will be easier to learn and internalize.

Though these patterns are all presented within the Dominant Bebop Scale, you can also apply them to the Major Bebop Scale as well as the Minor Bebop Scale. Just grab the pattern or lick that is unique to any particular example below and insert it into these other, lesser used, Bebop Scales and you'll be able to expand your improvisations exponentially.

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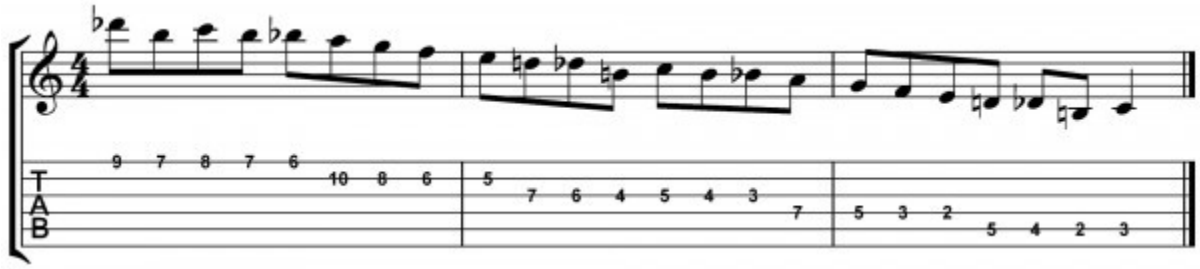
Bebop Scale Patterns for Guitar

1. Enclosed Root

In this first example we are going to use a very popular Bebop technique called an "enclosure." An enclosure is when we take a note, in this case the root, and play one note above that note, then one below, before finally settling on the note we were targeting in the first place. There are several common notes that we can enclose so we'll start on the root and explore more as we go.



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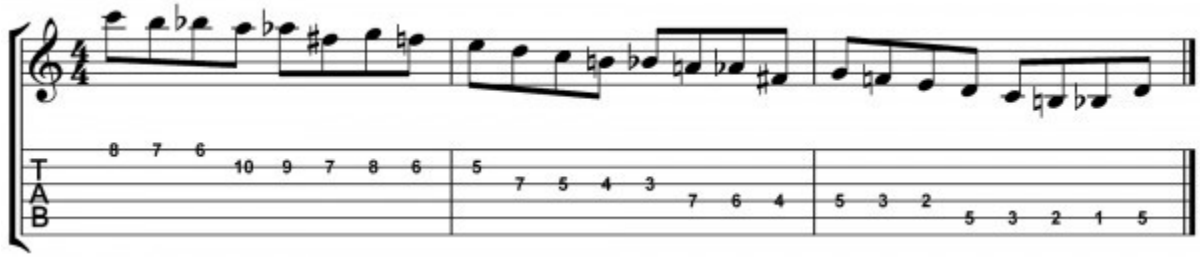
2. Enclosed Fifth

Now we can take the same approach and enclose the fifth of the scale. The enclosure technique works particularly well with the root and 5th of any chords. You can also use this approach on any note of the arpeggio or scale in your playing, but this is a good place to start. As well, there are specific patterns that can only be applied to the 3rd and 7th, that we'll see below, so enclosing the root and 5th is a great place to start at this point in time.



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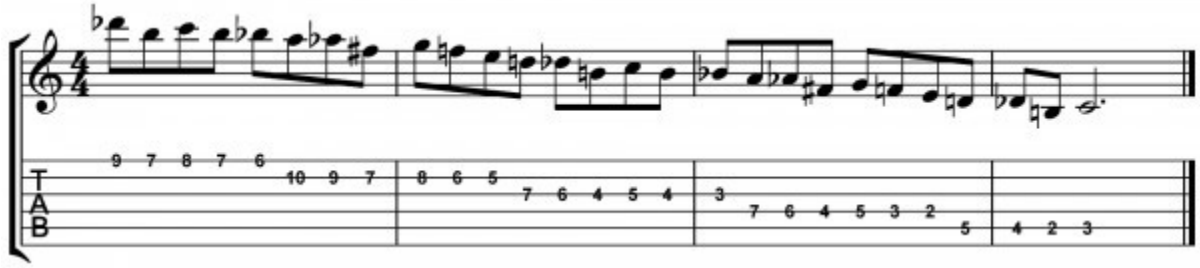
3. Enclosed Root and Fifth

Since we've enclosed the root and 5th separately, we can now enclose both of them together. Notice that by adding a simple idea, such as the enclosure(s), we're extending our melodic ideas without getting complicated. All we are doing is adding in the enclosure, or other Bebop techniques, as we descend the scale to make the scale last longer as we play down the fingering. This is a great way to get more mileage out of any scale you are working on, all of a sudden 7 notes becomes 10 or 12 or more, allowing you

to cover more ground with a simple scale or arpeggio fingering than you normally would without the pattern.



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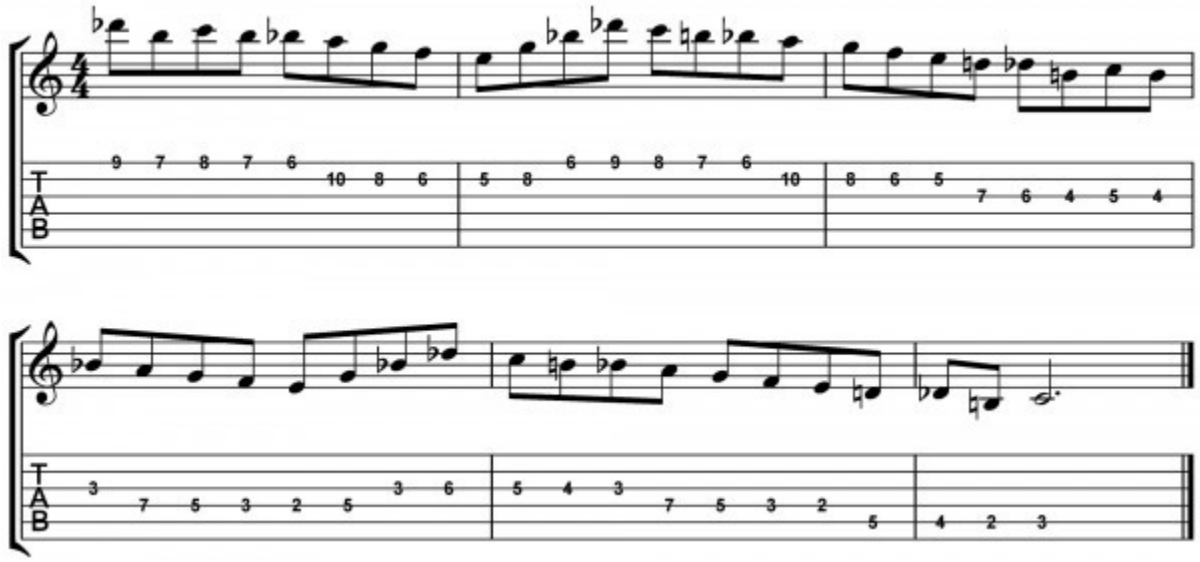
4. Enclosed Root with Diminished off Third

Now we can add a pattern to the third note of the scale, in this case a Diminished 7th arpeggio off of the root of the chord. Notice how by doing so, you are essentially "resetting" the scale back to the top of the fingering, allowing you to start over again and extend your melodic idea even further.

If this arpeggio is new to you, check out my page on Diminished Arpeggios for Guitar to see how these often-used devices lie on the finger-board.



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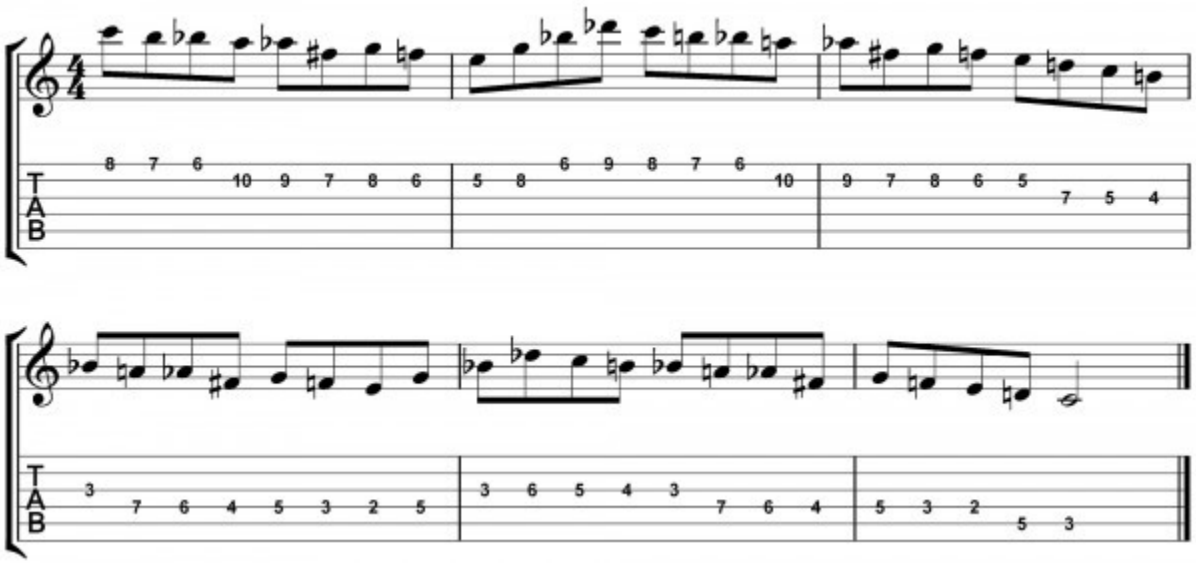
5. Enclosed Fifth with Diminished off Third

Here is a variation on that same concept, although instead of enclosing the root and adding the diminished arpeggio on the third, we will add the enclosure on the fifth, with the diminished arpeggio off of the third note in the scale. Though I didn't include it in this article, if you want to go further with this concept you can do an enclosure on the root and the fifth, while adding the diminished arpeggio to the third of the scale.



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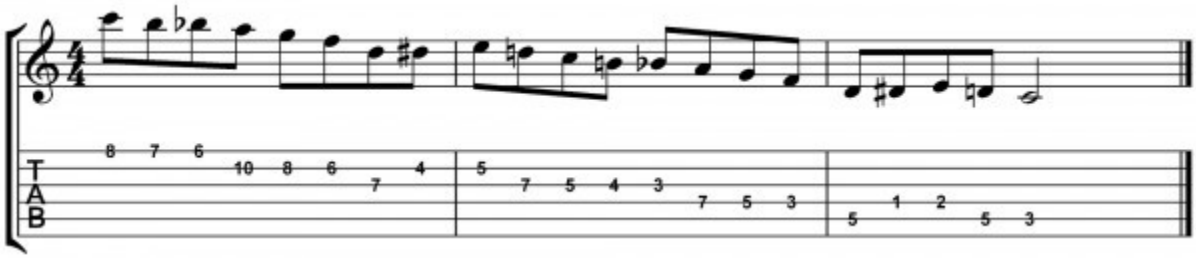
6. Double Enclosed Third

Up to this point we have been enclosing the root and the fifth with one note above and one below each target note. Now, we can add one more note to that equation and do a double enclosure, this time with the third of the chord. Here we have one note above, F, our target note, E, and two notes below, D and D#. Again, we are adding a simple melodic device to extend our scale, allowing us to cover more ground without getting too fancy melodically or moving into outside harmonic areas.



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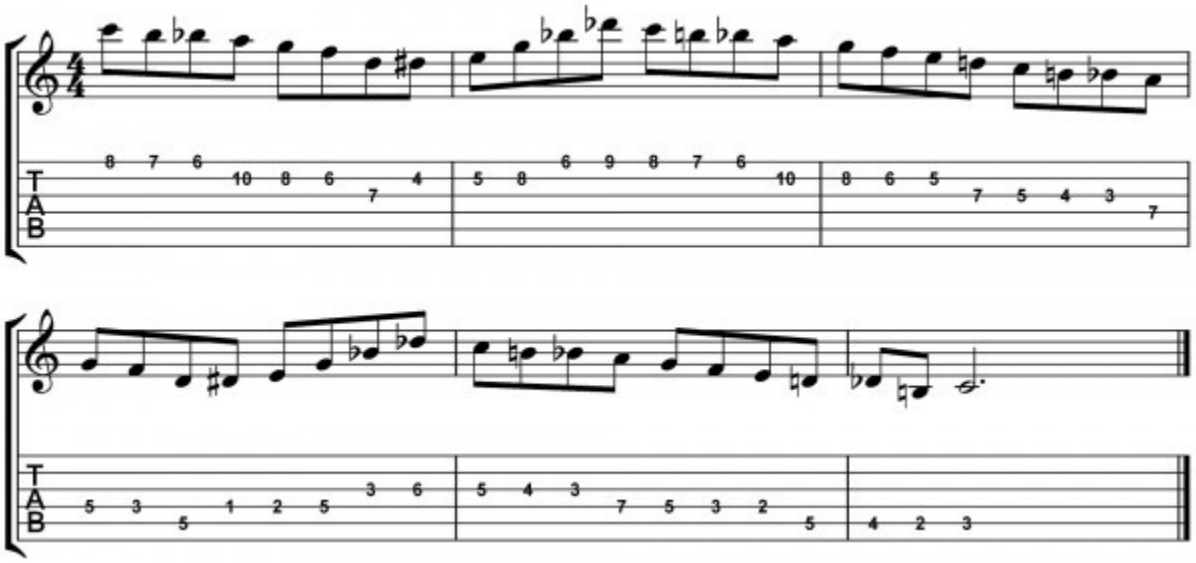
7. Double Enclosed Third with Diminished off Third

Here we are going to mix our double enclosure with the diminished arpeggio from the previous example to produce a longer melodic idea. This practice, of combining any or all of these patterns in your playing is totally acceptable. Feel free to experiment with combining as many of these as you feel comfortable with. You might like to just use one per line, or if you're like me, you might like to use as many as you can cram into an idea without going beyond the borders of good musical taste.



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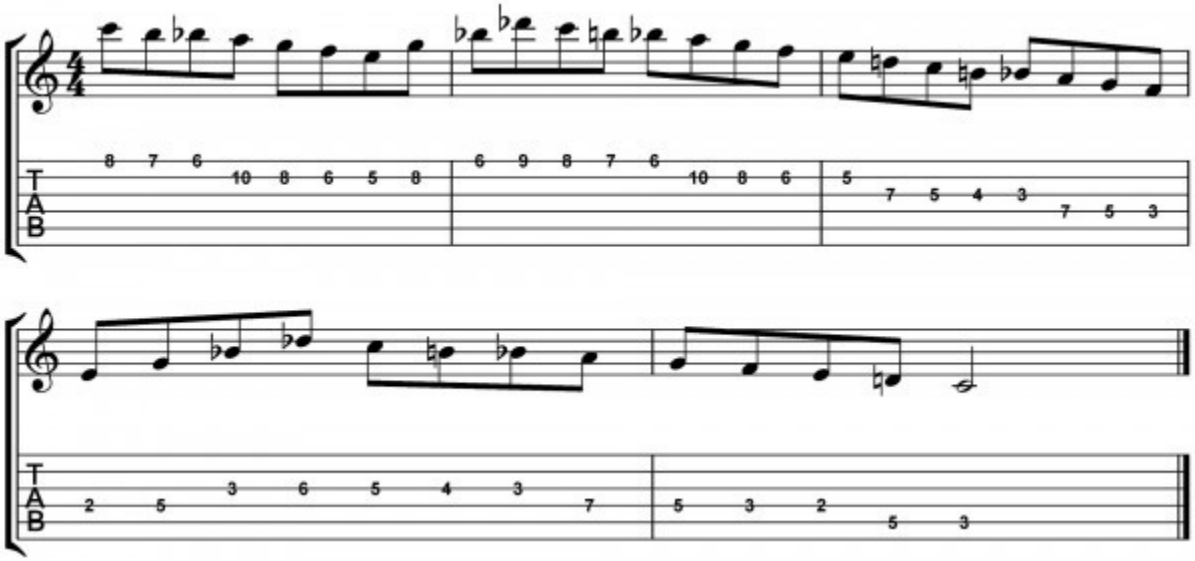
8. Diminished Off of Third

Since we've been pairing it up with the enclosures, let's just take a look at how the diminished arpeggio off of the third of the scale sounds on its own, with now other melodic device used in the scale. Again, this is a great way to "reset" the scale back to the top, as well as accent the b9 of the chord, in this case Db, since that is the landing note at the top of the arpeggio.



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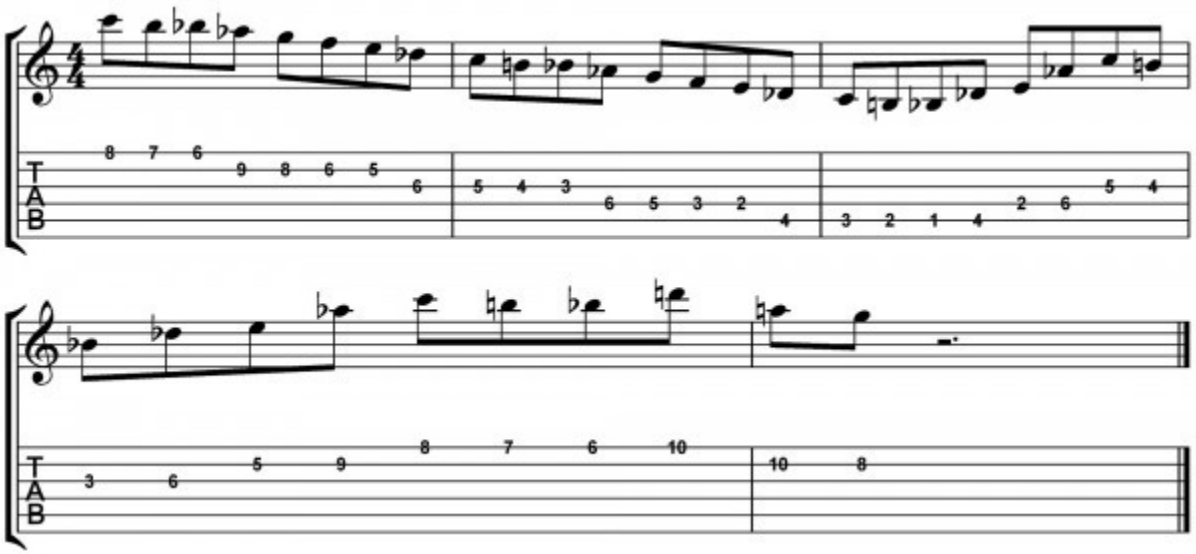
9. 7(b9/b13) With m7b5 Ascending

We will now apply a Bebop pattern to an altered version of the Bebop scale. We are going to flatten the 9th and 13th of the scale, common alterations for dominant chords, on the way down, then on the way up the scale, which we haven't seen yet, we will play a Bbm7b5 arpeggio to get us back to the top of fingering, with the Bebop note, B natural, added in for good measure.

If this altered sound is new to you, try just adding one outside note, the b9 or the b13, and then combine them in your playing. The key is to get these new sounds in your ears so that you can use them in your playing. If you just have the fingerings memorized it is a lot more difficult to solo with any idea until you can learn to hear that sound in the context of how your improvise.



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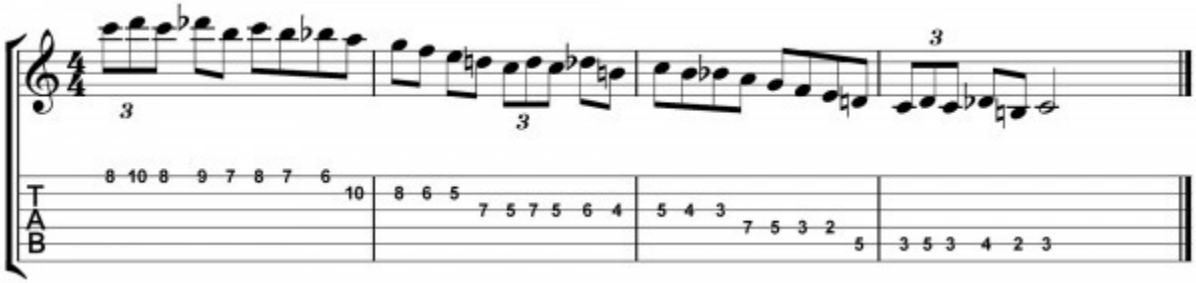
10. Triplet with Enclosed Root

Since we've been looking at straight 8th-note patterns so far, let's spice things up by adding in a triplet at the start of the scale, then descending the fingering with an enclosed root for adding spice to the line. You will have to alter your normal Beobp Scale fingering to get at the notes in the triplet, which extend above the upper tonic, so feel free to move your hand around on this lick. I would try to play the C with my middle finger, the D with my pinky, then jump back into the normal Bebop Scale fingering we have been using up until this point.



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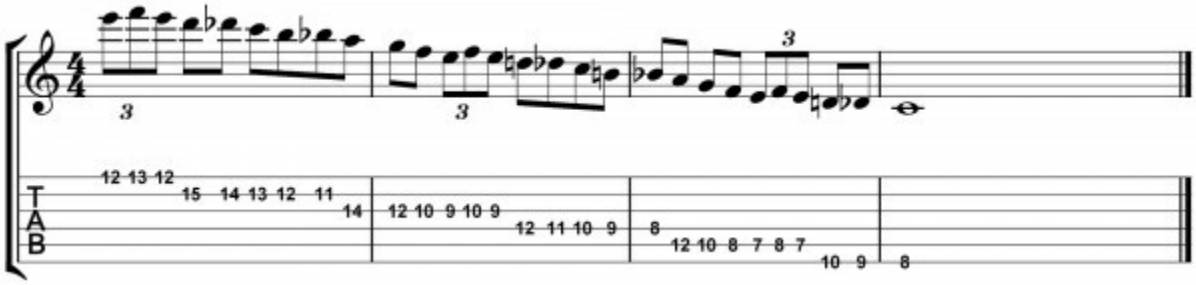
11. Triplet off Third with b9

Again, here is another triplet idea, this time starting on the third of the scale, and instead of using an enclosure, we are adding in the b9 color tone, from the previous example. If you like this sound you can also add in the b13, or both the b9 and b13, whatever your ear find attractive as far as added color notes found outside of the diatonic scale.



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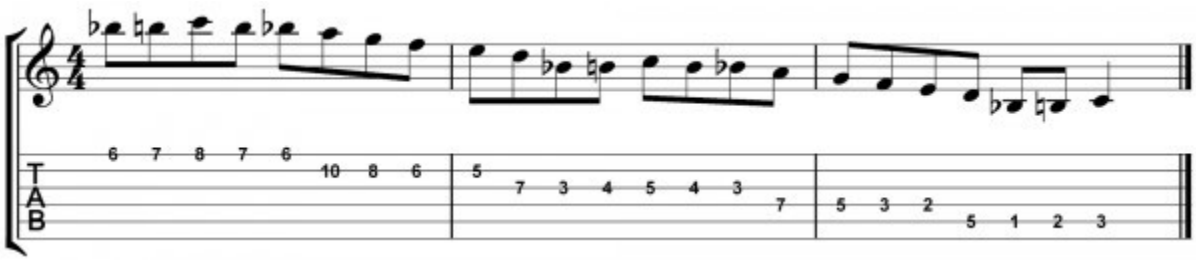
12. Chromatic Up from Seventh

Up to this point we have descended the scale from the top note on down, now, let's add a little melodic twist by starting on the b7 of the scale, then ascend up to the root chromatically, before descending the scale to the lowest note. This is a cool way to play the Bebop Scale without adding or altering any diatonic notes, just starting on a note that isn't the tonic and adding a change in direction to our melodic phrase.



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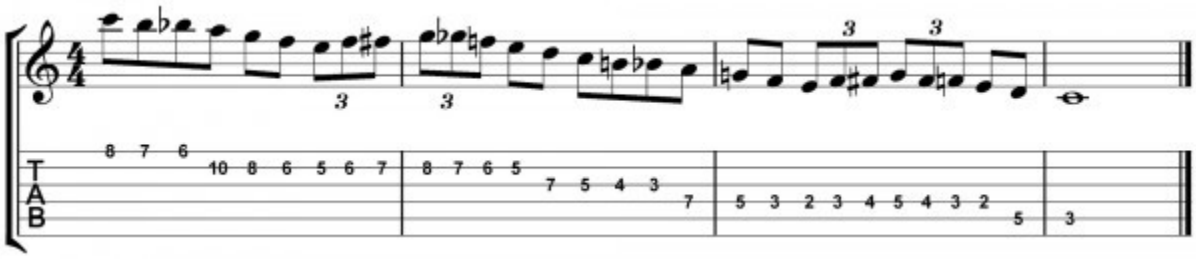
13. Chromatic Triplet from 3-5-3

Here is one of the most popular Bebop Scale patterns in any jazz guitarist's vocabulary. Great players such as Joe Pass, Wes Montgomery and Pat Martino have used this idea countless times in their solos over the decades. The key is to get the chromatic triplets as smooth as possible, so feel free to experiment with adding slurs and slides to those six notes in order to get that "liquid" sound that you hear in the playing of these great guitarists.



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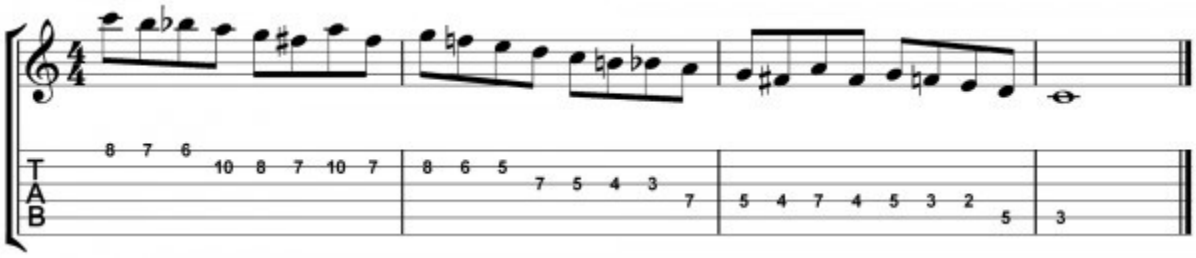
14. Deflection

This next example contains a device that David Baker calls a "deflection." Essentially we are using a short, four-note pattern to "reset" the scale by a few notes, not as much as the diminished arpeggio did, but still producing the same effect. Notice how the added note, the F#, functions as both an alteration, the #11 of the chord, as well as the lower-neighbor of the fifth, G, that we are using to deflect our line. An added harmonic color to our melodic phrase in this instance.



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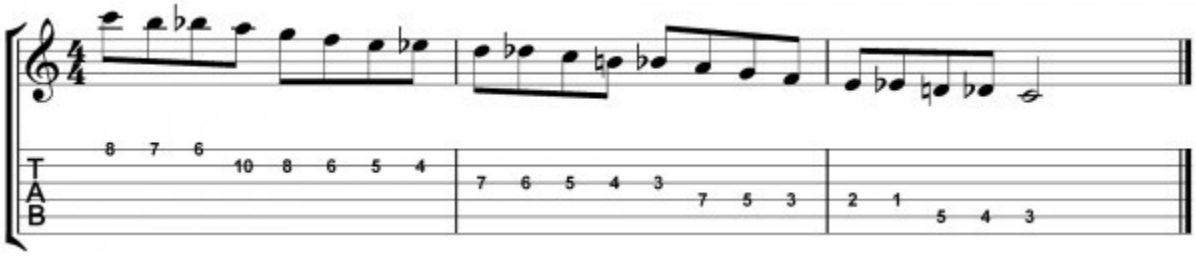
15. Chromatic Down from Third

Many players know about adding the natural 7th note to a Mixolydian Scale in order to build the Dominant Bebop Scale that we normally use in our playing. But, you can also add other chromatic notes to this scale, on the off-beats of the bar, in order to extend your melodic ideas. Here we are adding two more chromatic notes, between the 3rd and 2nd notes as well as between the 2nd and 1st notes of the scale. So now we have three added chromatic notes in our Bebop Scale, extending it even further than the normal 8 notes of the original form.



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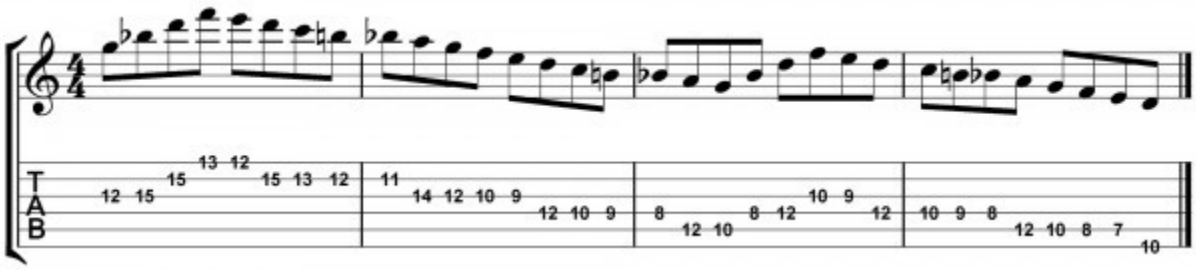
16. Ascending II Chord

Since we apply the Bebop Scale to a 7th chord, the V7 chord in any key, we can also pair it up with its popular cousin the iim7 chord. So, in this case we will ascend a iim7 chord, Gm7, before beginning our descending Bebop Scale idea. You can also spice this idea up by adding in any of the scale patterns that we have learned up to this point in order to extent this ii-V idea even further.



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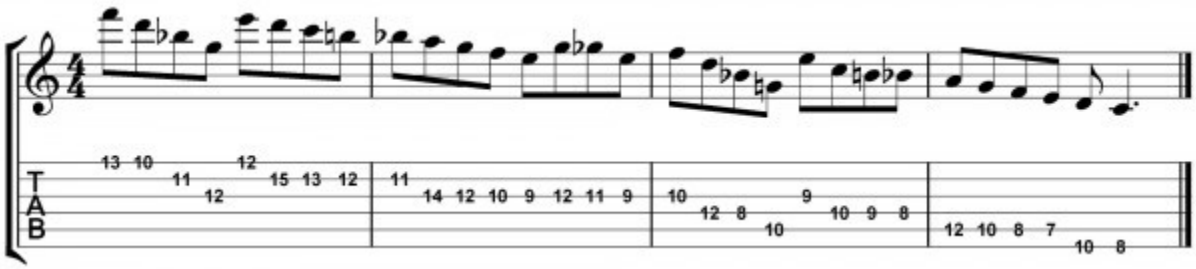
17. Descending II Chord

This pattern features the same idea, adding in a iim7 chord to the Bebop Scale, but this time we will descend the iim7 arpeggio before jumping into the Bebop scale.



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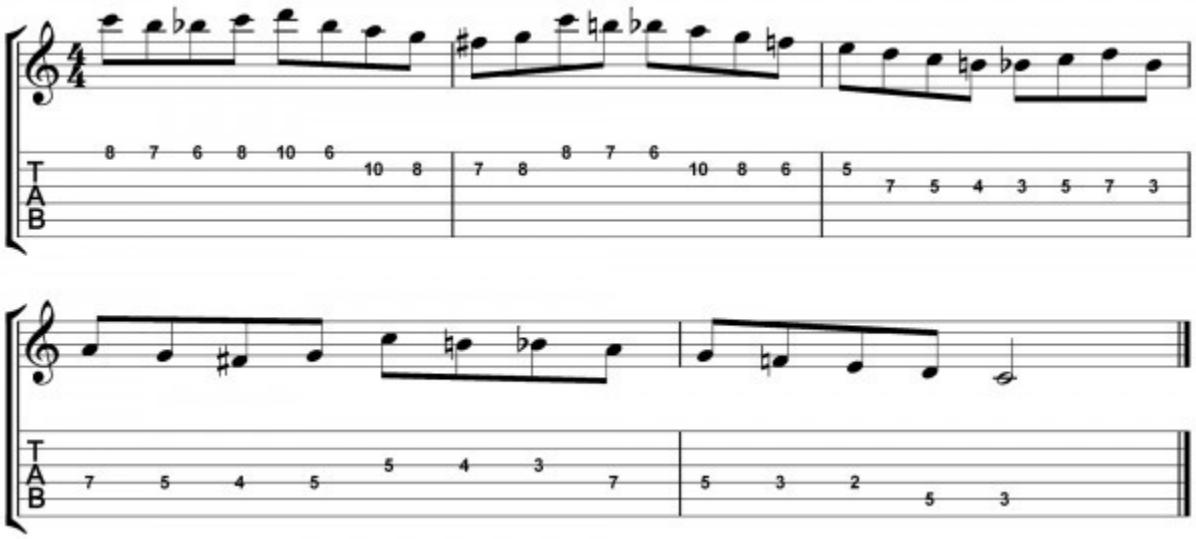
18. Ascending Diversion from Flat Seven

Here is another pattern that uses a diversion, including the added #11 note from the previous example, to extend our melodic ideas. Check out the first five notes in this pattern as well, this mini-motif is a very common phrase used by Bebop and Hardbop players, and it is worth checking out further, both in the context of this line and working on it separately as well.



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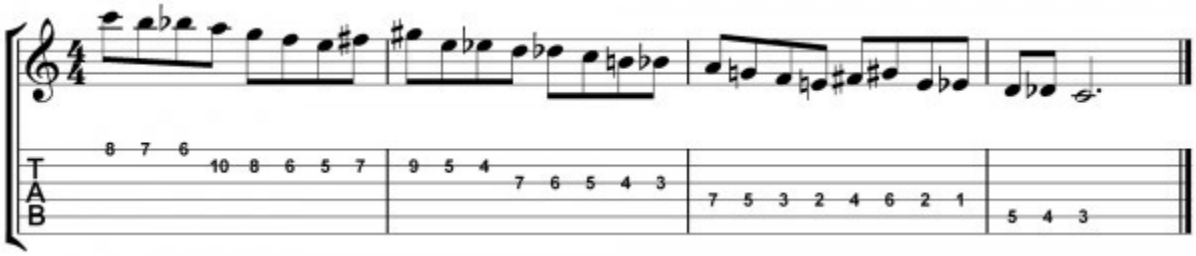
19. Ascending Diversion from Third

Here is another diversion, this time starting on the third of the scale and using both the #11 and #5 alterations to the scale. For good measure, we'll go ahead and add in the chromatic passing notes from the 3rd down to the root from the previous example, which extends the line even further. Remember that it is very important to be able to let your ears grow accustom to these new and highly chromatic sounds, so practice these ideas slowly and in all 12 keys across the neck in order to fully ingrain them into your playing.



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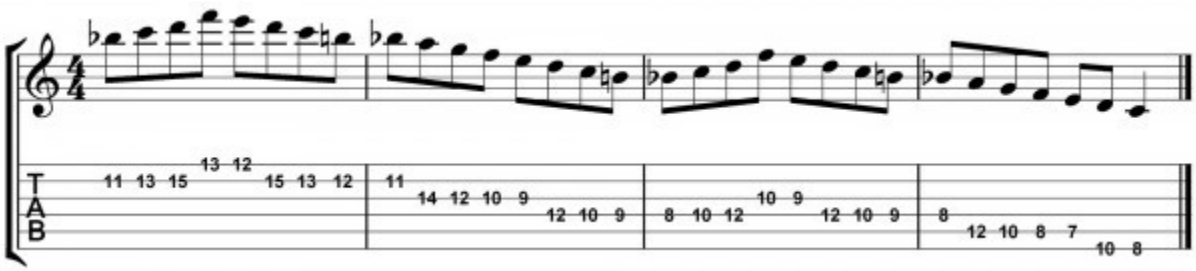
20. II-V From Flat Seven

In this example we are going to apply a very common Bebop technique called the 3 to 9 Arpeggio. What we are doing here, is adding in a iim7 chord at the start of the phrase. But, instead of playing the iim7 arpeggio from the root to the 7th of the chord, we are leaving the root out and playing the arpeggio from the 3rd to the 9th of the chord.To take the idea even further, we are using an alteration of the 3 to 9 concept here by using the 1-2-3-5 arpeggio pattern, something that John Coltrane and McCoy Tyner both favored in their soloing.

This kind of "rootless" arpeggio is very common in the playing of Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie and many other Bebopers. Check it out, this is a great melodic idea and one that every Bebop guitarist should have under their fingers.



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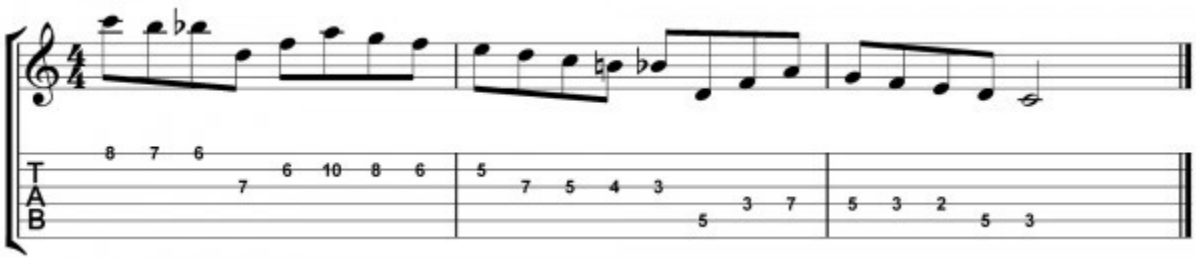
21. Honeysuckle

To finish off our 21 Bebop Scale Patterns we will apply a variation of the melody to "Honeysuckle Rose" to the Bebop scale. The idea is that we take a four note chromatic pattern, C-B-Bb-A, and use an triad starting on the 9th, Dm, to break up that pattern and extend our melodic idea from four notes to six.



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