

Harmonic Minor Scale

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i	ii [°]	III ⁺	iv	V	VI	vii [°]	
R	M2	m3	P4	P5	m6	M7	

A Harmonic Minor Scale

Am	B [°]	C ⁺	Dm	E	F (Fm)	G ^{#°}
AmΔ	Bm7b5	CΔ#5	Dm7	E7	FΔ (FmΔ)	G ^{#°} 7
Harmonic Minor	Locrian Natural 6	Ionian #5	Dorian #4 Ukrainian Dorian Ukrainian Minor	Phrygian Dominant Phrygian Major Altered Phrygian Spanish Phrygian	Lydian #9	Superlocrian bb7 Alt. Dominant bb7 Ultralocrian Altered bb7

How to read the Harmonic Minor Scale sheet

This document contains a lot of information ! However at first sight it might seem confusing, let's explain everything.

The first thing to notice is the second line, it is written : R, M2, m3, P4, P5, m6 and M7. They represent the **intervals contained within the Harmonic Minor Scale** from the root. They inform how to build the Harmonic Minor Scale from any note.

The first line gives the **scale degrees**. A capital letters represent major chords whereas minuscule letters represent minor chords. For example, in the Harmonic Minor Scale, the chord built based on the third note will always be a minor chord. The chord built based on the fifth note will always be a major chord. The third chord is an augmented chord noted III+. The 2nd and 7th chords are diminished.

The second part of the sheet provides an example of a given Harmonic Minor Scale for a particular root note predefined, here A. It shows the notes in the **A Harmonic Minor Scale** so that you can easily compare it with the A Natural Minor sheet.

The last line shows the chords material for the given A Harmonic Minor Scale.

Why does the Harmonic Minor Scale matter ?

To put it shortly for four reasons :

- To **understand how most Western songs are built** and how to create your first own minor songs with more interesting sounds you would not be able to produce if you only used the Natural Minor Scale chords.
- In the end, **get the bigger picture** of the music you hear everyday
- **The Harmonic Minor Scale is not that used in Western harmony on its own.** However it is a great complement to the natural minor scale that composers use to make great songs
- Create great **oriental sounding music**

About the Harmonic Minor Scale

The Harmonic Minor Scale is named this way because it is used a lot for harmonic construction as a complement to the Natural Minor Scale.

In music theory, there are three minor scales :

- **Natural Minor Scale** – or Minor Scale for short as this is the most common. It is overused everywhere and you can hear it in most of the Western songs.
- **Harmonic Minor Scale** – it provides great harmonic or chord materials to support the Natural Minor Scale. We will see why right after.
- **Melodic Minor Scale** – it provides great melodic extensions and it typically used in jazz because of its jazzy sound.

The **Harmonic Minor Scale was created to remove a flaw** of the Natural Minor Scale : it does not have a leading tone compared to the Major Scale. Now, in the Major Scale the leading tone (the 7th note) is so important because it gives the scale an inner tension-release feature : when you reach the unstable leading tone your ears really expect to land softly on the tonic.

This is what makes music interesting : a good chord progression is full of tension and release moments. This is a way to make the audience more attentive to the tune, to make songs that are living, not bland. The leading tone is undoubtedly a great feature that the Natural Minor Scale does not have !

Moreover, the leading tone is what allows the dominant chord to exist. The dominant chord is the major chord constructed on the fifth degree. It is so important because it is the chord that pulls you back strongly to the home / tonic chord.

Thus, the Natural Minor Scale lacks a leading tone and a dominant chord : the Harmonic Minor Scale corrects these flaws.

This is why a Harmonic Minor Scale is a Natural Minor Scale with a raised 7th degree. In the Natural Minor Scale, the 7th interval from the tonic is a minor 7th whereas in the Harmonic Minor Scale this is a major 7th which makes it a leading tone. Notice that it introduces a weird interval : a 1.5 tone interval between the 6th and 7th notes.

The use of the Harmonic Minor Scale

The Harmonic Minor Scale is generally not used on its own. Composers use it as a complement to the Natural Minor Scale to enrich the sound of a song and introduce tension.

Generally, we use all the chord materials from the Natural Minor Scale when composing a minor song. However when we want to add tension, we introduce the major fifth chord from the parallel Harmonic Minor Scale constructed on the same tonic center as the Natural Minor Scale. This is the simplest way to use the Harmonic Scale, however it can be used in much more ways.

Harmonic Minor Scale - Exercises

Let us decompose the learning of Harmony of the Harmonic Minor Scale with different exercises.

1 - Understanding the chord materials within the Harmonic Minor Scale.

Understanding why these chords are of this quality and the distance that separate each of them is the first thing to learn. In order to practice the understanding of that, I would suggest you pick any note. Try to construct the Harmonic Minor Scale where the root is the chosen note. Deduce the seven notes contained in this Harmonic Minor Scale and the chords in it by writing them down. Play the chords on your instrument.

2 - You can start creating your first music. Try respecting some rules at the beginning using what you know about the scale degrees and their roles. For example, you can create a 4 chords progression song, this is the most common pattern. You can explore these scale degrees on top of a metronome :

i - ? - ? - V

i - ? - VI - V7

i - ? - ? - V7

A ? means you can put any degree here.

3 - I recommend you learn the CAGED system and apply it on the harmonic minor scale chords. There is a course on the CAGED system in the advanced courses.