

“Outside” the Blues Pentatonic

Using the Half-Whole Scale

The Half-Whole scale or sometimes called, “Dominant Diminished” is an excellent scale for Dominant Seventh chords. It should not be confused with the Whole-Half or, “Diminished Scale.” The Diminished Scale is better applied upon a Diminished Chord, where the Half-Whole, (Dominant Diminished) is better applied with Dominant Seventh chords.

The initial movement of intervals in the Half-Whole gives us a “b9” interval and a “b3.” The altered 9th makes this scale perfect for Dom.7th chords with a “b9.”

The “going outside” sound of players like; “Larry Carlton,” “Mike Stern,” and “Robben Ford,” can be largely associated to their use of the Half-Whole scale. The major scale and their modes offers only seven notes, however the Half-Whole offers us eight notes. There are dozens of patterns for this scale, but like you may have noticed with other scales, you don’t have to learn them all to begin making some cool music.

Practice the example of this scale given below off of the Tonic note of “C”

Ex:

Because this scale has a repeating pattern of intervals it can sound quite dark played on it’s own. So, it is important to learn how to shape lines around the scale to reach melodies that exist within it’s structure. The more subtle you can be the better. Play the lick below to hear the interplay of the new melodic variations possible with this scale.

Example #2).

The Half-Whole Scale Continued

Example #2). When using the Half-Whole the sound of the notes that fall “outside” can often take some getting used to. Play the next lick and notice how the use of this scale can suggest new melodic variations not available with the standard blues scale.

Example #2 musical notation showing a guitar lick. The notation includes a treble clef staff and a six-string guitar tablature below. The tablature shows fret numbers: T (13, 13), A (14, 14), B (13, 13). The lick is marked with *sl.* (sustained).

Example #3). The scale, as you can begin to notice, can offer a wealth of jazzy sounds and melodic movements. As you practice the scale more there will begin to be a more natural sense of phrasing with the scale's unique color tones. Very cool interval jumps found within the scale can cross a lot of harmonic boundaries. While the scale is obscure in its melodic design it can offer a number of soulful and sweet phrases. Try the third example lick below...

Example #3 musical notation showing a guitar lick. The notation includes a treble clef staff and a six-string guitar tablature below. The tablature shows fret numbers: T (10, 13), A (11, 13), B (13, 13). The lick is marked with $\frac{1}{4}$ and $\frac{1}{2}$ (half note) dynamic markings.

Practice performing the Half-Whole Scale and do your best to find the notes that sound good to your ear. Licks are fine, however there are always really good notes that exist around each chord and it is important to search for those notes using simplicity and a focus on melody.