



Diminished/Half-Whole Tone Scale Fingering

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Some time ago I wrote an article for the SJGS News about the Diminished/Half-Whole Tone Scale. If you do not have a copy and would like one, please let me know and I will send you one. I have been working a bit on this scale, so here are some further thoughts.

You can regard this as just one, or as two separate scales. As the name implies the scale consists of alternate half and whole tone steps i.e. play a note, play one on the next fret up, then skip a fret and play another, then another just one fret up and so on.

If you start with a two fret whole tone interval, the scale is known as a Diminished scale, and yes, you've guessed it, the scale works well over diminished chords which appear all over the place in jazz tunes.

If you start with a semi-tone, the scale is more properly named a Half-Whole Tone scale, and it sounds great over dominant 7 chords with the b9 or #9 added. These are also very common in jazz tunes, and as 'alterations' of dominant 7 chords.

To get the sound in your head, the easiest way to play this scale is up and across the fingerboard e.g. starting on the low E string at F (fret 1) :-

1,2,4,5

Now move over the A string and play notes at frets

2,3,5,6

Now move over the D string and play notes at frets

3,4,6,7

Now move over the G string and play notes at frets

4,5,7,8

Now move over the B string and play notes at frets

6,7,9,10

And finally move over the top E string and play notes at frets

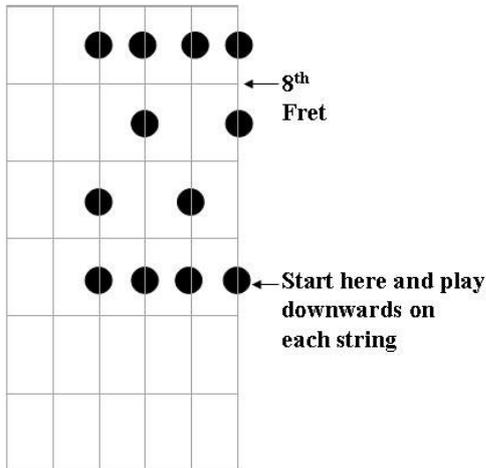
7,8,10,11,13 where you will be at F, two octaves above where you started.

Use a similar approach for the Diminished scale version.

Practise this a bit and you will see a pattern emerge which makes it relatively easy to play, at least, as a scale for developing technique and getting the sound in your head.

However, the above is not good fingering when using the scales over 7b9, 7#9 or diminished chords. It's too 'all over the place', and takes you away from 'playing in position', which is what you want to do to for efficient technique.

I have been trying to work out such an efficient fingering for this scale and have come up with the following.



For example, play the scale at the 8th Position using the pinky for the notes on fret 11, the ring finger for the notes on fret 10, the forefinger for the notes at fret 9 and the index finger for the notes at fret 8. There is no need to move from 8th Position up and down the fingerboard.

Hopefully, you can 'see' in the above diagram subsets of the dots outlining C7, C13, C13b9, and C7#9 chords, and the scale will sound great over these, and also the same chords 3 frets higher or lower.

The scale fingering above also works over Cdim, Ebdim, F#dim and Adim chords, but you need to first shift the pattern down one fret.

- John Clarke