

PART II: HEXATONICS

We are going to look at ways of constructing scales from pairs of triads. In order for this approach to yield a hexatonic (six-note scale), the triads must be mutually exclusive – they must contain no common tones.

Of course, there is no reason why you shouldn't experiment with the use of triad pairs that do have tones in common, or combining two or more seventh chords, or triads, with each other, or simply using other sets of intervals in any permutations that sound good to you. These approaches can lead to very interesting sounds, and can be particularly useful in composition. For now, though, we'll focus on exclusive triads to generate six-note scales.

The triad is a very strong harmonic building block, the foundation of the Western musical tonal system in fact, and the basic element with which most musicians have the easiest familiarity. Consequently, combining different triads is an extremely convenient shorthand method for internalising a wealth of different gapped scale sounds. Furthermore, these gapped scales derive a good deal of their interest from the fact that they combine two simple musical gestures (simple triads) to create a structured more complex whole. They are also interesting for the ambiguity they invoke in comparison to seven-note scales.

Obviously, even restricting ourselves to exclusive triad pairs, the number of permutations is enormous. I'll choose here to stick to major and minor triad qualities and highlight those triad pairs that have good clutches of chord tones to apply to a variety of different chord qualities.

Different people play, and think, in different ways. If you wish to explore exhaustively the possibilities of the other types of triads in combination, go right ahead. But there's a degree of subjective pragmatism here: I personally feel that it's useful to know that major triads on C and D give a C Lydian sound, and not so useful to know that a major triad on C and a diminished triad on D, for instance, give an F melodic minor sound. Of course, it's all up to you – but what I'm asking you to do is begin with the examples I give first, then take things further if you feel fired to do so.

The headings I will assign here are given for purely descriptive purposes – they aren't commonly used terms.

A. MAJOR-MINOR HEXATONIC

Combine a major and minor triad a tone apart



This hexatonic scale can be used over $F\Delta$ and $Dm7$. Also possibly $Gsus$, although there is a better hexatonic option for sus chords shown below. The structure exists in C major and F major.

B. MAJOR-MAJOR HEXATONIC

Combine two major triads a tone apart



Probably the most important of all the hexatonic structures. A very versatile structure, primarily used for solid access to $D7sus$ and C Lydian (major or dominant, since the 7th is absent). It can also be used over $Am7$, as well as $Bb\Delta+5$ and, somewhat more ambiguously, over $E\emptyset$ and $F\#7alt$. The structure exists in both G major and G melodic minor, uniquely among the triad pairs. It exploits the points in major and minor harmony where major triad pairs coincide.

C. DIMINISHED HEXATONICS

Combine major/minor triads, in any permutation, a tritone apart



Major with major, major with minor, minor with major or minor with minor. All these combinations spell out a diminished scale for use over $C7b9$, $Eb7b9$, $F\#7b9$ and $A7b9$.

D. EXOTIC HEXATONIC

SPANISH PHRYGIAN HEXATONIC

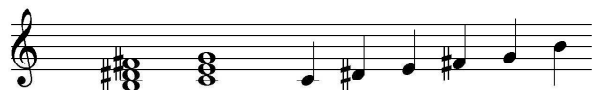
Combining 2 major triads a semitone apart



The structure is from F harmonic minor. A triad side-slipping by a semitone over the lower root (C) is a signature sound of flamenco guitar. Spanish Phrygian differs from modal Phrygian in that it contains a major, rather than a minor, third. Use sparingly, please (Ole!).

LYDIAN #9 HEXATONIC (DIMINISHED MAJOR)

The same structure analysed over the upper root, Db, gives a chord quality which some refer to as as Lydian #9 and others as diminished major. Here it is in C:



The tones outlined are root, #9, 3rd, #4th, 5th and major 7th. The scale strongly implies C diminished, but unusually specifies a major, rather than dominant 7th. It also strongly implies C Lydian, but the 9th is sharpened.

Use of this hexatonic structure allows you to play a diminished sound on a I chord – a sound much used by the likes of Chick Corea and Herbie Hancock. This hexatonic structure allows you to focus clearly on the crucial chord tones of this sound, while the structure of the pair of triads adds an extra degree of coherence. An often-played reharmonisation of a ii-V-I in this style is to detour at the diminished on your way to the I:

|| Dm7 | G7 | CdimΔ (or CLyd#9) | CΔ ||

Miles also often used this chord quality as a substitute for a tonic chord, in the *Workin' Quintet* as a final I, and later on the album *In A Silent Way* more extensively.

THE WHOLE-TONE GROUP OF SIX

How you choose to assimilate and use these structures is entirely up to you. In my opinion, the most powerful hexatonic combinations involve major triads, and it just so happens that there's a tidy way of organising sets of major triads into a scheme that's useful and easy to remember.

We're in the key of C. Let's build major triads a tone apart, starting from that root:

C D E F# Ab Bb



The roots ascend a whole-tone scale. Here's how you use them:

The first two triads in combination give you C Lydian (dominant 7th optional, sounds good either way).

The second and third together give you CΔ+5.

The fourth and fifth together give you C7alt.

The sixth and first again (the sequence repeats every octave) give you C7sus.

Running through major triad pairs in a whole-tone scheme like this, to give different qualities on the same root, is an easy way to assimilate a useful batch of hexatonics. Hopefully it will also prepare you to accurately see, internalise and manipulate triad pairs. You can then expand into other triad and chord qualities, as you wish and need.