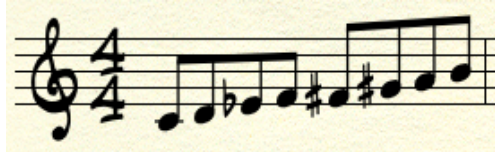


Subtitled: How I Finally Learned, Really Learned, My Diminished Scales.

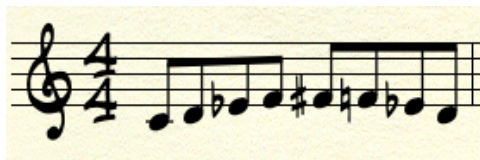
Diminished scales were always that elusive sound that I wanted to try to understand but could never get my head around. Actually that was my problem. I could think my way through it, but I really didn't have it under my fingers. My brain kept getting in the way. I was thinking too much. Here's how I overcame that.

First, a little review. The diminished scale – the one you would use over a diminished chord – is made up of alternating whole steps and half steps (W H W H W H W H) and has 8 notes in it. It's a symmetrical scale. (Symmetrical scales can have any of its notes be the root and still result in the same pattern of intervals between the notes.) The C diminished scale is shown below (also the Eb, F#, and A Diminished Scales)



The first thing I did was break it down into a manageable pieces. If you divide the scale exactly in half you get two minor tetrachords: C and F# (a tritone away from each other). See [my post on tetrachords](#) for more info. So the first thing I did was start to practice my minor tetrachords in all 12 keys. I made them my long tone warm up for a while, played them up and down over and over, practiced them with a metronome at various speeds, did everything I could think of to get really comfortable with them. (It should be noted that I did this all from memory. At one point, a while back, I tried learning these by writing them out and practicing them, but I never got very far. Even the patterns I found in various jazz books were very easy for me to read, but never I was unable to really absorb them into my playing. This approach worked much better for me.)

The next thing I did was add just one more note. This was to get the color of that 5th lowered a half step (from the minor scale) into my ear and get my fingers used to the pattern. I practice the same way as with the tetrachord, started slow with long tones and gradually getting them faster and faster.



The next thing I stumbled upon by accident, but as with many happy accidents, this yielded me the breakthrough I needed to not only get the scales under my fingers but the sound in my ear. For many years I have been teaching this following pattern to my students. We call it "the 595". Below it's shown in C Major, but I would play it in all the major modes, harmonic minor and ascending melodic minor as well.

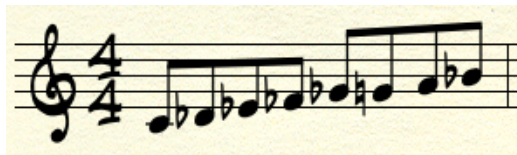


As it works out you can apply the diminished scale to the pattern, the only change being that you never make it up to the 9th, your highest note it now the root. (because there's 8 notes in the diminished scale instead of 7). The nice thing about the pattern is that you get to practice the half step that connects the two minor tetrachords many times and from both tetrachords. (The F to F# and the B to C) along with the entire scale.



With this pattern I practiced it slow, gradually speeding it up and then I would practice different articulation and patterns rhythms. (With a metronome) I found that I quickly got the diminished sound in my ear and soon I was able to play it without having to *think* about it anymore. And that's when the real fun began, because I was able to improvise using that color and was really excited about it. I started playing around it – most improvising in one key and seeing all the combinations I could come up with.

As state above, this is the scale used over diminished chords. But if you start the pattern on a half step you get another diminished scale – called a whole bunch of different things, I prefer half-whole diminished to avoid confusion. This scale is used over dominant chords. The scale is below and if you think of C7 – you get a whole bunch of cool notes along with the 3rd and 7th (Fb is the enharmonic to E).



I approached practicing this scale the same way I described above, but I found that it came quite easily after working on the diminished. My fingers and my ear already knew what they were doing. I started improvising with in over dominant chords – using Aebersold's Dominant Seventh Workout Vol. 84.

Happy Practicing! 😊