

Minor Scales

Just like the major scale, the minor scale is composed of 7 notes and therefore 7 intervals.
The minor scale is spelt:

Tonic

major 2nd [1 tone / 2 frets]

minor 3rd [1 1/2 tones / 3 frets]

perfect 4th [2 1/2 tones / 5 frets]

perfect 5th [3 1/2 tones / 7 frets]

minor 6th [4 tones / 8 frets]

minor 7th [5 tones / 10 frets]

So let's consider this with a real note for a tonic and calculate the notes for a minor scale.

Tonic = E, so here goes:

The major 2nd is two frets above, so is it F# or Gb?

All of the notes have to appear once and in sequence [just like when we looked at the major scale].

The letter F comes after E [not G] so the 2nd has to be 'F' something.

As it is a major 2nd [2 frets] it will be F#.

The 3rd has to be G something. As it is a minor 3rd [3 frets above the tonic] it has to be G natural.

By applying this method as you did with the major scale but using the template of intervals for the minor scale, you should end up with the scale of Em = E, F#, G, A, B, C, D

So, you did this for the major scales so not try it with the minor scale.

Work out the notes of the follows scales:

Am

C#m

Dm

Bbm

Ebm

F#m

Hmmmmm something interesting stands out here.

Notice that the note values look a little familiar?

For example, the notes in the key of Em are exactly the same as those in the key of G major

Key of Em = E, F#, G, A, B, C, D

Key of G = G, A, B, C, D, E, F#

Notice also that the Em scale starts from the 6th degree of the major scale.

For now, treat this as a very useful coincidence.

So a minor key is related to a major key in a sort of "mother – daughter" relationship.

Related. That's an interesting word in this case.

The Natural minor scale is also known as the "Relative Minor" scale.

These are simply two alternative names for the same thing.

A rule of thumb:- if you go to the 6th degree of a major scale, you'll find the tonic of its 'relative minor' scale.

It's called the 'relative' minor because the two scales are related [sharing the same note values].

Consider the major key as the 'centre key' which is the 'birthing place' for the minor.

The Centre key simply provides the pool of notes, and nothing more – the relationship ends there and the two key are considered as completely independent beyond this simply similarity.

And in reverse, you can look at the 3rd degree of a minor scale and find the relative major.

Try a few.

The key of C = C, D, E, F, G, A, B therefore the relative minor key is?

The key of E = E, F#, G#, A, B, C#, D#, therefore the relative minor key is?

The key of F = F, G, A, Bb, C, D, E, therefore the relative minor key is? [hint: the saddest of all keys]

and in reverse

The key of Cm = C, D, Eb, F, G, Ab, Bb therefore the relative major key is?

The key of Bm = B, C#, D, E, F#, G, A therefore the relative major key is

Note: The relative minor is also known as the 'natural minor'. The two terms are completely inter-changeable to the point where I've even heard them both used within the same sentence.

So why do the major and minor scales sound different if they are related and made of the same notes?

This question is like a thorn in the side for some people when they first begin to learn the basic principles of music.

The major and it's relative minor are different because the intervals between the notes are completely different thereby giving a totally different tonal relationship between the notes of the scale and the tonic.

This is much easier to see if you look at a major and minor scale side by side with the same tonic.

The key of G = G, A, B, C, D, E, F#

The key of Em = E, F#, G, A, B, C, D

all though the two keys are related – sharing the same note pool – the distances from each note to the tonic is different. This is not so easy to see because these two keys have different tonic notes. Listing the notes in the key of E major, so that the minor and major scales share the same tonic value, will illustrate the interval differences much more clearly.

The key of E = E, F#, G#, A, B, C#, D#

The key of Em = E, F#, G, A, B, C, D

Very different as you can see.

What about the chords?

The chords that you derived from the key of G major also apply to Em but their position have now changed in exactly the same way as the notes of the minor scale did.

The G major scale produced:

I = G, II = Am, III = Bm, IV = C, V = D, VI = Em, VII = F#mb5

So the Em scale produces:

I = Em, II = F#mb5, III = G, IV = Am, V = Bm, VI = C, VII = D

This also therefore applies to the 7th chords.

In the key of G, chord V7 is D7. D7 is chord VII7 in the key of Em.

When we look at things like modulation techniques [changing key], you'll begin to understand how powerful this little piece of knowledge can be

And the main thing to appreciate:

The notes in the key of G and Em are the same [from the same note pool], but the similarity ends there they are completely different keys with completely different sounds and complete different uses