

# Introduction

## The Concept

The diminished scale (sometimes called the “eight-tone symmetrical scale”) is a staple in modern jazz improvisation. And for good reason. When applied to dominant seventh chords it contains nearly all the possible tensions (three upper partial and two diatonic tensions). It also has a distinctive color and a natural kind of kinetic energy that not only strongly invites resolution to tonic, but also, contains lots melodic possibilities within itself. This book is about exploring some of these possibilities. Specifically, creating melodic movement by organizing the notes of the diminished scale into diatonic triad pairs.

This is done by means of *extraction* and *reorganization*. Look at the examples below:

The image contains three musical staves in treble clef. The first staff shows the diminished scale in its ascending and descending forms, with enharmonic spellings for certain notes. The second staff shows the scale applied to an F7 chord, with a triad pair D minor/Ab minor extracted and combined with the scale, resolving to a Bbmaj7 chord. The third staff shows the entire diminished scale reorganized into two triad pairs (F Major/Ab minor and D minor/B Major) resolving from F7 to Bbmaj7, with triplets indicated over some notes.

The first example is the diminished scale in its ascending and descending form (with enharmonic spelling of certain notes). The second demonstrates the *extraction* and *combination* of the triad pair D minor/ Ab minor from the scale as it applies to the F7 chord resolving to the Bb Major 7 chord. The third example uses the entire diminished scale *reorganized* as two triad pairs (*F Major/Ab minor* and *D minor/ B Major*) as they resolve from F7 to Bb Major 7.

As you may have noticed, the triad pairs in the examples above are *diatonic* (major and minor). Though it is possible to arrange the notes of the diminished scale in symmetrical, non-diatonic triads (diminished triads), I’ve chosen to focus on organizing the scale in its diatonic triad form only. I do so because diatonic triads aren’t as vague. They point to some kind of specific tonality, and can imply a more direct harmonic statement. The C

minor triad usually says much more about key center, color (and sometimes even harmonic function) than does the C diminished triad.

There are many ways to combine these diatonic triad pairs, but I've limited the work in this book to what I call *exclusive* triad pairs. This simply means that no two triads share a common pitch. For example, D Major and Ab Major form an exclusive pair, while D Major and B Major do not (they both share an F#). It's absolutely fine to organize the triads in "non-exclusive" ways (sharing common tones); I've simply chosen this way to express a more specific tonal set, and to make the concept a bit more finite and approachable.

I also think that it's important to keep in mind that you can't really "disguise" the sound of the diminished scale by organizing it diatonically. You still end up with triads (and their implied tonalities) that *move* in a *symmetrical* way, and that has a very strong and distinctive sound. But you sure can add lots of interesting surprises and possibilities by opening up your thinking and your ears with how you deal with this scale.

### **The aims of this book**

I've developed and practiced the material in this book with specific aims in mind. Here I offer this work:

- To help you (as mentioned above) to think and hear the diminished scale in a different way, particularly in using it over dominant 7<sup>th</sup> chords resolving to tonic.
- To provide you with a written, methodical and thorough reference to the exclusive diatonic triad pairs extracted from the diminished scale.
- To help broaden your understanding of using and combining triad pairs as they apply to dominant 7<sup>th</sup> chords. (For example, combining triad pairs extracted from the diminished scale with pairs extracted from the melodic minor scales relative to the V7 chord.) This can open up a *huge* amount of possibilities, and deepen your practical understanding of "upper partial" harmony and harmonic substitution as you approach improvisation and composition.
- To provide technical challenges. By playing these patterns in all 12 keys (as I have presented them), you'll constantly be improving your ability to get around on your instrument.

### **Format**

I'll assume you have a working knowledge of the diminished scale (especially as it relates to dominant 7<sup>th</sup> chords) for you to be interested in the contents of this book. Therefore, I'll refrain from going into the basic theory of the construction and application of the diminished scale.

This book is organized into three chapters. The first is to introduce you to the secondary diatonic triad organization of the diminished scale, and establish an enharmonic consistency in labeling the triads. The second chapter introduces you to each possible exclusive triad pair from each scale. The third chapter has you combining exclusive triad pairs over dominant 7<sup>th</sup> chords.

I'll also be labeling the scales themselves as "scale 1, scale 2 and scale 3". This is purely arbitrary, as there is no hierarchy of these scales. I do this simply to communicate more readily about how the work in the book is organized.

All exercises are written in treble clef. The range never exceeds that of the saxophone (Bb below middle C up to F# above the staff), and many of the exercises are purposely put into a comfortable mid-range between these extremes. Feel free to transpose the octave wherever you think it necessary or desirable.

All harmonic applications are from dominant 7<sup>th</sup> chords resolving to tonic chords in major keys. Rhythmically, I've kept the language fairly simple, mostly eighth notes and some triplets. You should feel free to alter the rhythms to add interest and variety.

### **How to practice this material**

I've organized the material in the way that I've studied it: first learning the secondary triads; then the exclusive triad pairs; and then the multiple triad pairs. I think it is *especially* helpful for you to master the secondary diatonic triads from each scale (Chapter One) in order to establish a strong foundation in your *hearing* and *thinking*. This will give you a more immediate access to recognizing and understanding the triad pair relationships, as well as applying them over dominant 7<sup>th</sup> chords.

I suggest that in the beginning you focus mostly on one scale at a time. So for example, really get to know the secondary triads formed from Scale 1, in Chapter One; then work on the exclusive triad pairs formed from this scale in Chapter Two. When you're satisfied with your knowledge of the material, go back and follow the same procedure with the other two scales. After you've gained good control over the material from all three scales, continue on to the exercises in Chapter 3. If you follow this procedure, by the time you get to the material in this chapter (which organizes the entire scale into four diatonic triads), you'll be able to understand and apply it fairly easily.

Finally, work toward really *hearing* the material you practice (be able to sing it!), and start putting it into practice on tunes, etc. Have fun with it. Best wishes!