

The Harmonic Minor Scale

While there is only one major scale there are three types of minor scales. Natural minor (Aeolian Mode), Harmonic Minor, and Melodic Minor. The Harmonic Minor scale is a very exotic sounding scale that will add color and depth to your sound.

While you hear Harmonic Minor played often in neo-classical, metal, and shred guitar, the scale is also utilized in flamenco, East European, Middle Eastern, Indian music, as well as mainstream rock, jazz, and even bluegrass music.

Harmonic Minor has a very distinctive tone, kind of Spanish or Middle Eastern sounding. It is a Natural Minor scale with a raised seventh. Natural minor has a flatted seventh while Harmonic minor has a natural 7th. Remember the key note in the scale is that 7th, and it is always a half step behind the root note.

The scale degrees are almost the same as Natural Minor except for the 7th:

Harmonic Minor - 1, 2, b3, 4, 5, b6, 7

Natural Minor - 1, 2, b3, 4, 5, b6, b7

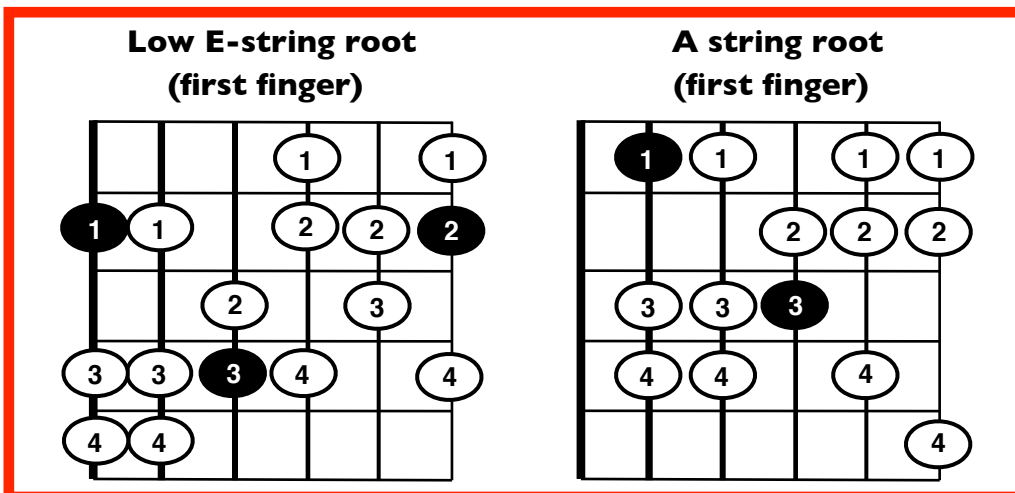
The modal scales hidden within the Harmonic Minor scale are fantastic. One awesome mode within is the Phrygian Dominant scale. This scale is the 5th mode of the Harmonic Minor Scale and we get to that mode by going through the Harmonic Minor Scale.

Phrygian Dominant is always the 5th mode of the Harmonic Minor scale. To play in E Phrygian Dominant we have to determine what scales 5th note is an E. The answer is A. So to play in E Phrygian Dominant play all your A Harmonic Minor scales but start on and emphasize the E notes.

Harmonic minor also sounds great when played over a major V chord in a minor key progression and over minor plus seven chords. Try resolving the 7th degree to the root for a nice tension and release feel.

You can also play the scale over straight minor chords and over minor key vamps, but it will sound a bit exotic. Experiment with the scale and see what sounds best to your ears.

Below are two scale shapes that you can grab fast and easy in any key. Play the root note with your first finger on the 6th string root in the one shape and the 5th string root in the other. Over time learn this scale over the entire neck as well as the harmonic minor scale link diagrammed out in the next page.



KEY POINTS:

Harmonic Minor produces a super cool and different exotic tone.

Phrygian Dominant is always the 5th mode of the Harmonic Minor Scale.

Harmonic Minor has just one note difference than the Aeolian mode. Harmonic Minor has a major 7th while the Aeolian mode has a flatted 7th.

Harmonic Minor Link & Phrygian Dominant

Now that you know a few Harmonic Minor scale patterns let's link them together and play them laterally across the neck. Below is a three-octave Harmonic Minor scale link that will take you over half the neck.

This scale link is incredibly useful and easy to play as it utilizes repeated fingerings. Slide up a half step with your first finger when playing the low-E, D, and B strings. Shift up a half step, or one fret, with the first finger for the 1-1 finger combinations. **Remember, the key note in Harmonic Minor is that 7th, and it is always a half step behind the root note.**

Practice this link in all keys and be sure to make mental notes when passing through root notes. This scale link is moveable with the root note determining the key. To locate these scales fast, first find the low root note.

A killer mode within the Harmonic Minor Scale is the Phrygian Dominant scale. This scale is the 5th mode of the Harmonic Minor Scale and we get to that mode by going through the Harmonic Minor Scale. Phrygian Dominant is more a major mode that sounds fantastic when played over a long ringing major chord.

Phrygian Dominant is also called the Spanish Phrygian Scale. Its like a major version of the Phrygian mode. Phrygian has a minor 3rd, while Phrygian Dominant has a major 3rd - all the other notes are the same.

Phrygian Dominant - 1, b2, 3, 4, 5, b6, b7

Phrygian - 1, b2, b3, 4, 5, b6, b7

Get to Phrygian Dominant by going through the Harmonic Minor scale. Phrygian Dominant is always the 5th mode of the Harmonic Minor Scale.

So to play in E Phrygian Dominant you want to determine what Harmonic Minor scale's 5th note is an E. The answer is A.

To play this Harmonic Minor Scale link in the key of A start with your 1st finger on the 4th fret of the low E-string and play the shape. You start a half step below the root and slide with that first finger on the low E-string.

Utilize the 1-3-4 fingering to play the entire link and slide up a half step on the low E, D, and B strings. Find the root notes and blast away!

Play A Harmonic minor but start on and emphasize the E notes for E Phrygian Dominant. Keep going back to and landing on those E notes to emphasize E Phrygian Dominant.

To determine which parent scale to convert use the same techniques that we discussed in the modal playing written lessons. Utilize the Analyze, Convert, and Emphasize - the "ACE" principle.

Remember that it's all about the sounds and moods that you create. Be sure to listen to the sounds of harmonic minor and Phrygian dominant and their textures over certain chords and chord changes. Get familiar with the sounds, experiment, and, as always, be creative.

**Three-Octave
Harmonic Minor Link
Scale Link:**

● **root notes**
○ # **fingering to utilize**