

Improv Vocabulary: Pentatonics 1 joshuadavis.org

The numerous scales (modes) available might seem overwhelming for some. This page presents one of the most commonly used scales in jazz, a scale that has been explored countless times throughout several eras of recorded jazz.

Get started by playing a few scales up and down in one octave.



Can you play the same scales throughout the entire register of your instrument? Or as much of that register as you commonly use? A young violinist might be able to play C major like this, slowly:



Put on the Don't Worry Be Happy accompaniment mp3. Play a C major scale along with the groove. Start and stop whenever you like. Is it good music? Or, perhaps a more reasonable question: Is it music you'd enjoy hearing repeatedly? What could you do to make it better? Rhythm, motivic fragments, etc., etc. There are many things that could be done to build phrasing and unity. What about pitches? What if we take some of the pitches away? Play this:

What's missing?



Pentatonic scale

This common sound is simply scale degrees 1 2 3 5 6 of a major scale.



Can you play some pentatonic scales throughout the entire register of your instrument? -Or as much of that register as you commonly use?

Put the Don't Worry Be Happy accompaniment mp3 back on. Play the C pentatonic scale, starting and stopping whenever you like. How does this compare with what you played earlier? That young violinist might play something like this:



Many claim that the pentatonic approach ensures more pitch repetition and brings a sense of familiarity and accessibility. More on that later.

What about rhythm?