

Be-Bop Scale Basics

by Scott Wilson

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What is a Be-Bop Scale?

The Be-bop scale can be easily thought of as a Major Scale with an added b7 scale degree. Because of the added b7 scale degree, the be-bop scale is used over dominant chords which are spelled with chord tones 1, 3, 5, b7.

"What's so special about the be-bop scale and why is it so useful in jazz?"

Many people ask the above question. For starters, the be-bop scale has both the b7 and the natural 7th in the scale. This extra note in the scale allows improvisors to always be landing on chord-tones when playing the scale in eighth-notes or sixteen-notes (See example below). Notice that all the chord-tones fall on the downbeats. The downbeats spell an F7 and the scale being used is the F Be-bop Scale.

Jazz Gem * Notice that the chord-tones always fall on downbeats (which, in jazz, is the longer of the two eighth-notes). With the long downbeats always falling on chord tones this helps clarify the sound of the chord.

Putting Together Burning Be-bop Lines: It's Easy

Understanding the 3 basic ROTATIONS!

To understand the ways the Be-bop Scale can be used in jazz to facilitate soloing and connecting ideas, you need to investigate "rotations." In jazz, "rotations" are notes that encompass a "target note" and draw it out by approaching the note from above and below.

R1 = Rotation to the first scale degree. Although this rotation ends on the first scale degree, it starts on the 3rd scale degree and approaches the first scale degree from a half-step below (E to F).

R3 = Rotation to the 3rd scale degree. Although this rotation ends on the 3rd scale degree, it starts on the 5th scale degree and approaches the 3rd scale degree from a half-step below (G# to A).

R5 = Rotation to the 5th scale degree. Although this rotation ends on the 5th scale degree, it starts on the 7b scale degree and approaches the 5th scale degree from a half-step below (B to C).

Understanding the 3 Basic CONNECTORS!

Connectors are what make rotations string-together to create long be-bop lines. Below are 3 basic connectors.

You can use these to connect rotations R1, R3, and R5

C1 = The Be-bop Scale



C2 = 3rd to the 7b Up.



C3 = 3rd to the b7 down.



Now lets makes some great be-bop lines.

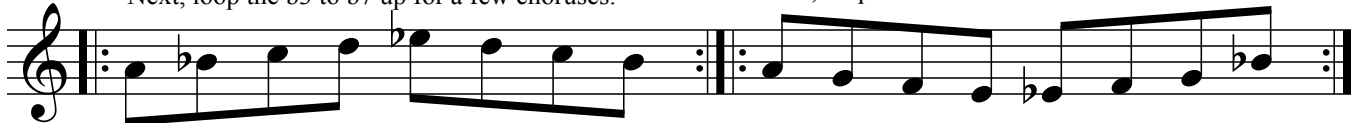
Turn on a medium tempo F Blues and try the following exercise.

First just play the F be-bop scale as smooth as possible for a few choruses.



Next, loop the b3 to b7 up for a few choruses.

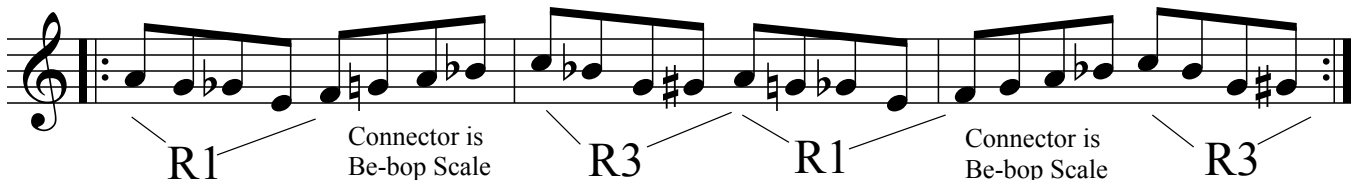
Next, loop 3rd to the b7 down for a few choruses



Next, pair together the 3rd to the b7 up and 3rd to the b7 down. Play this for a few choruses until it feels smooth.



Next, loop R1 to R3. Use the F Be-bop Scale as the connector.



Next, loop **R1** to **R3** to **R5** to **R3** to **R1** (your are rotating to chord-tones 1, 3, 5, 3, 1).

Musical notation showing a sequence of rotations: R1, R3, R5, R3, R1. The R5 rotation is marked with a triplet '3'. Connectors are indicated: 'Connector is Be-bop Scale' between R1 and R3, and 'Connector is 3rd to 7b up' between R3 and R5.

Next, try looping **R5** to **R3**.

Musical notation showing a sequence of rotations: R5, R3, R5, R3. Both R5 rotations are marked with a triplet '3'. Connectors are indicated: 'Connector is 3rd to b7 up' between R3 and R5, and 'Connector is 3rd to b7 up' between R3 and R5.

Next, Try combining other combinations (see below).

Musical notation showing a sequence of rotations: R5, R3, R3. The R5 rotation is marked with a triplet '3'. Connectors are indicated: 'Connector is 3rd to b7 up' between R5 and R3, and 'Connector is 3rd to b7 down' between R3 and R3.

Musical notation showing a sequence of rotations: R3, R1, R3, R1. The R3 rotation is marked with a triplet '3'. Connectors are indicated: 'Connector is Be-bop Scale' between R3 and R1, 'Connector is 3rd to b7 down' between R1 and R3, and 'Connector is Be-bop Scale' between R3 and R1.

This should get you started with regards to understanding how the Be-bop Scale creates be-bop lines. Now, for your own practice, try to string-together the following combinations in your own way. Remember to use the Connectors to move from Rotation to Rotation. Also keep in mind that you can start a musical idea with a Connector (i.e. starting with the 3rd to the b7 up).

- #1 R1 to R5 (loop it with repeats until it is smooth.)
- #2 R3 to R1 to R5 (loop it with repeats until it is smooth.)
- #3 R5 to R5 (loop it with repeats until it is smooth.)
- #4 Invent several combinations yourself and play them for your class/friends/teacher.